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Religious Authority and the State in Africa

A Report of the CSIS Africa Program



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Introduction: The Intersection of Religion and Politics in Africa

Jennifer G. Cooke

Overview

In the last decade, U.S. policymakers have been increasingly open to exploring religious issues at a broad policy level. There has been stronger emphasis on the role of religion in post-conflict engagement, and U.S. assistance programming has given greater attention to religious actors in peace-building and service delivery. In policy and security analyses pertaining to Africa, however, issues of religion are most often looked at through the relatively narrow lens of conflict or violent extremism, with very little attention to the broader political and religious contexts in which they play out. This study, undertaken with the generous support of the Henry Luce Foundation, examines how religious and political dynamics intersect and influence each other in six very different country contexts and describes how these interactions are changing as pressures for political liberalization mount and as pluralism and competition in both the political and religious spheres increase.

The countries examined—Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda—offer examples of how religious actors and institutions are asserting themselves in political life, from grassroots mobilization to national debates around constitutionalism, justice, religious pluralism, and human rights. They also offer illustrations of how political actors variously accommodate, confront, co-opt, or instrumentalize religious institutions and actors to further political ambitions and strategies. Each of the countries studied is for various reasons an important regional player and partner to the United States and a target of expanding U.S. engagement. It is all the more important, therefore, that U.S. policymakers more fully understand and account for the evolving landscape of religious institutions and the role they play in shaping political discourse and state responses. It is also hoped that close examination of these particular cases will offer lessons and insight applicable more broadly in Africa—or at least guidance for how to analyze and understand these trends in different country contexts.

Context and Parameters of the Study

Religion and faith are profoundly important to the vast majority of people living in sub-Saharan Africa. Global surveys confirm the depth of religiosity on the continent: very few Africans are religiously unaffiliated, and a greater proportion of people in Africa consider religion very important in their lives than in any other region of the world.¹ It is not surprising then, that religious actors and institutions have been powerful forces in shaping political development and outcomes on much of the continent. Indeed, in much of Africa it is impossible to understand the process of modern state formation without taking religious dynamics and institutions into account. Yet despite considerable attention to the role that ethnicity and ethnic identity play in shaping political outcomes in Africa, there has been relatively little analysis of the impact that religious communities and institutions have had in this regard. There has been even less comparative analysis on how religion and religious communities themselves have been shaped by political forces over time.

The intersection of politics and religion has played out in very different ways across Africa, depending on the constellation of social, cultural, historical, and political factors that are unique to any one state and which themselves evolve over time. The last quarter century has seen profound social, economic, and political change across Africa, with the pace of change accelerated by rapid demographic shifts, globalization, new technologies and networks, and the rising expectations of a predominantly young population. The end of the Cold War and the demise of apartheid in the 1990s galvanized African citizens and civil societies to push for democratic reform within their own countries, triggering popular protests that in many African states culminated in the introduction of multiparty elections and expanding opportunities for political engagement. Democratic progress since the political openings of the 1990s has been decidedly mixed: in some cases incumbent regimes have taken on the trappings of democracy—multiparty politics and regular elections—as window dressing for the continuation of authoritarian rule. In others, democratic consolidation has been slow and prone to setbacks and regression. Nonetheless, this second wave of independence did herald a new era of broader political engagement, bringing a wider field of competitors into play, and emboldening citizens and politically engaged civil societies to demand more from their governments.

In parallel with those political changes, there have been important shifts in Africa's religious landscape. Religious affiliation, practice, and structure are fluid over time, and that has always been the case in Africa. Since 1900, adherents of Islam and Christianity grew from a small minority in Africa to the overwhelming majority across the continent, with enormous diversity within each of these two dominant faiths. Reformist and revivalist movements are not new phenomena. The East African Revival movement, which swept through the region in the 1930s and 1940s, had an enduring impact on evangelical and mainline Christian churches. Islamic reformist movements have waxed and waned for

1. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, DC: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, April 2010), <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2010/04/sub-saharan-africa-full-report.pdf>.

centuries, challenging the legitimacy of both secular and religious authorities. As in the social and political realm more broadly, the pace of change in the last 30 years has been particularly rapid. Globalization, communications technologies and social media, the rise of televangelism and religious entrepreneurs, and the process of political liberalization itself have meant that global ideologies and religious influences can proliferate and penetrate more quickly and deeply within society, drawing new adherents from within communities across the religious spectrum. In many cases, rising competition within the political realm has been mirrored by greater competition among religious actors and denominations.

Religion, religious groups, and faith-based organizations have had influence in the political realm in many ways, both direct and indirect. Religious institutions have frequently provided public services such as health and education—or even security—that the state is unable or unwilling to provide. Indeed, in a number of countries periodic surges in religiosity have been attributed to the absence of the state in people's lives as a meaningful source of service, security, or structure. In his chapter on Nigeria, for example, M. Sani Umar points to the critical role religious institutions have played in moments of state crisis or retreat, pointing to the surge of religious activism during the years of structural adjustment reforms, when access to public services was drastically cut, or the popular push for shari'a courts in some northern states as citizens sought credible alternative mechanisms to uphold and enforce rule of law. Similar examples across Africa abound: from the role of churches in management of social service delivery in the Democratic Republic of Congo to the rise of the Islamic Courts Union in Somalia in the early 2000s, an association of neighborhood shari'a courts that provided services and security in Mogadishu and ended (temporarily) the predations of deeply unpopular warlords. This study takes these types of interactions to some extent as a given, and likewise that as a by-product they open the door for religious groups to engage with and potentially influence the state in political ways. The dimensions we are most interested in analyzing here are the new and changing ways in which religious actors, institutions, and constituencies consciously step into the political arena in order to promote or safeguard their interests, and conversely how political actors and institutions have intervened in the religious realm to safeguard their own. What issues do religious leaders engage on? Have these issues changed over time? Has the level of interaction or influence stepped up and if so, why? How do religious leaders organize themselves to take part in public life? How do political leaders respond and try to shape this engagement? What role have religious institutions played in pressing for political reforms or democratization? How has democratization affected these institutions and their relationship with the state?

Religious doctrine and personal religious experience may shape political perspectives, but although those dynamics offer a rich field of inquiry, they are not generally within the scope of this study. The study is concerned primarily with Christianity and Islam, the two most prevalent religions on the continent, and on the institutional and leadership structures through which they have most often interacted with the state. African traditional religions, elements of which are often incorporated in individuals' beliefs and practice, are

not treated here. Not all the countries studied are democracies: Uganda is decidedly authoritarian, and democratic progress in Niger, which underwent its most recent coup d'état in 2010, remains fragile. All countries have seen mounting popular pressures for democratic reforms or consolidation.

The case studies are intended to illustrate the different ways that state and religious institutions interact and shape each other over time. There is no uniform pattern, and these interactions vary from country to country, marked by distinct differences between and within the main faiths. In a number of cases these relationships have evolved over centuries, often requiring a look back at the earliest interactions of religious scholars and missionaries, precolonial political structures, colonizing forces, and African populations. Institutional relationships between religion and state have been at times symbiotic, at others adversarial, and in some cases denominations have preferred to keep state actors at arms' length. Religious groups can serve as important mediators in moments of crisis and important advocates on issues of development, equity, transparency, and justice, but they can also legitimate repressive state polities under the guise of promoting social peace. They can advocate for progressive causes (for example, mobilizing against HIV/AIDS or female circumcision in Senegal and Uganda), but their interventions can also be the source of social divisions (for example, the push by Christian churches to eliminate constitutional provisions on Islamic Kadhi courts) or used to legally marginalize or disempower certain segments of society. Despite this diversity, a number of themes emerge across the countries examined.

- *Religious leaders attempt to balance political and social influence.* Established religious institutions confront an enduring dilemma: while they will often seek to curry political favor, influence, or patronage through collaborative relations with political elites, they must at the same time retain their relevance and appeal among their followers, because it is the loyalty of followers that makes these institutions useful partners to the state. This dilemma becomes more acute as popular aspirations and demands on the state rise, citizens become more politically active and informed, and new religious influences compete for popular standing and followers. If religious leaders tilt too far toward the state, they risk being seen as collaborators in a corrupt political system, potentially undermining their social legitimacy. If they take on a more adversarial relationship with the state, they risk being politically punished or marginalized.

The high level of societal legitimacy, organizational structure, and independent sources of funding that many religious institutions enjoy insulates them, to some extent, from government retaliation. While testy government leaders may call on religious counterparts to stay out of the political realm, even the most authoritarian among them may think twice before detaining or harassing a prominent religious figure. How religious institutions have chosen to use the leeway they are granted spans a broad spectrum, from collaboration to defiant confrontation. On one extreme, for example, are members of the Catholic clergy accused of collaborating with the Rwandan government to exterminate Tutsis during the 1994 genocide. At the

other end is the pivotal and courageous role that church leaders for decades played in the fight against South Africa's apartheid state. In Kenya, as David Throup points out, the Anglican and Catholic churches were powerful advocates for political liberalization and an end to one-party rule in the 1980s and 1990s. During Senegal's economic crisis of the 1970s, the country's most influential Muslim leader called on followers to defy the government by smuggling their agricultural products out of the country rather than submitting to a rapacious government marketing board.

The vast majority, however, fall somewhere in between. Many religious institutions have used their quasi-protected position to facilitate debate on political issues, even sensitive ones, but will stop short of fundamentally challenging the legitimacy of the state or leading the charge for accountable, democratic government. In Uganda, as Richard Downie points out, religious institutions and interfaith groups have spoken out on curbing corruption, promoting equitable natural resource management, and even on the need to investigate human rights abuses by the military. Yet, with very few individual exceptions, religious groups and leaders have stopped far short of criticizing the government or President Yoweri Museveni directly. When a leading opposition leader was beaten by security forces as he demonstrated in the streets of Kampala, rather than admonish the security forces the church leadership called on him to stay home next time, "for the sake of public safety." In Senegal, the Sufi brotherhoods have cast themselves largely in the role of mediators, tasked with keeping the social peace, a role that lends itself more to incrementalism (with a slightly stronger tilt to the status quo) than bold calls for fundamental reform. In Nigeria, religious leaders participating in a 2014 national conference tasked with addressing the political challenges arising from the country's federalized structure quickly fell out over squabbles on whether Muslims and Christians and northerners and southerners were equitably represented.

- *Political competition creates religious fragmentation.* Democratization and genuine political competition has in a number of cases opened up divides within and among religious institutions. These institutions are, after all, made up of citizens who have different political interests, perspectives, and preferences that are shaped by many factors beyond religion. With the advent of political choice, rifts may emerge along regional or ethnic lines (for example, leadership in Kenya's Catholic Church split along ethnic lines in post-2000 political debates), generational lines, or a profusion of personalized preferences, as in Senegal, where a proliferation of parties and presidential aspirants is mirrored by diversity of political opinion and loyalty within the ranks of the Sufi orders. In some cases, stark differences have emerged between leaders and their followers. With multiple parties and the fluidity of coalition politics, long-standing relationships between state and religious institutions become more uncertain and atomized. Some institutions have sought to distance themselves from the political battlefield, but others have thrown themselves into the competitive fray with the risk of diluting institutional cohesion and influence. Conversely, politicians have in some cases appealed more directly to religious identity, using

religion as a wedge issue to give them a competitive edge, with the risk of diluting national cohesion and deepening inter- and intra-religious divides.

- *Established relationships are challenged by new players.* Among the recurring themes across the studies is how the more established elements within the two main faiths and their influence within the political realm are affected by the proliferation of less institutionalized religious actors, both Christian and Muslim, that are rapidly building followings across the country. Established religious organizations (for example, the Anglican Church in Uganda, the Sufi orders in Senegal) have often developed strong and abiding links with the state, symbiotic relationships that developed first with the colonial administration and were often sustained into the postindependence period. States see these religious institutions as powerful forces for mobilization, mediation, and preserving social peace, even at times of unpopular state policies. Religious leaders, for their part, may see their relationship with the state as a source of patronage, influence, and collaboration in preserving institutional standing and primacy. The expansion in recent decades of new religious actors, often charismatic or reformist, is often seen as a challenge to those established relationships of mutual interest. While these new influences may have allies within the political elite (Pentecostals and the first family of Uganda or Kenya, for example), they do not as yet have the collective institutional heft to rival that of established players and have tended to focus more on building their following (and resource base) than in engaging directly with the state or playing a major role in political debates. Many of these new players have also shown less inclination to engage in intra- or inter-religious dialogue or in efforts at mediation or reconciliation.
- *Political actors seek to shape the engagement.* The state has actively tried to shape and control religious group access and modes of engagement both with the state and between different religions and denominations. Various methods are deployed: religious balancing in appointments to public office and other positions of authority, as in Nigeria; secular constitutions that place certain areas of public life off-limits for religious actors (for example, prohibitions on religious political parties); or state-supported structures of inter- or intra-religious dialogue. But the ascendant strains of Christianity and Islam are vocal, increasingly powerful, and more resistant to being co-opted. Hence the state faces greater challenges in managing the increasingly divergent, unruly landscape of religious actors. Intra-religious differences may dilute the influence of particular Christian and Muslim leaders or denominations but also make it harder for the state to control and manage religious relations and defuse growing inter-religious tensions in many of the focus countries.
- *State efforts to curb extremism are varied and their effectiveness is uncertain.* The expansion of militant religious extremism in East Africa and the Sahel has led a number of states to prescribe a particular form of (quietist) Islam by setting strict limits on the kinds of engagement allowed. Some have created religious supervisory or vetting institutions. Niger has deployed what to date has been a relatively successful model; in other cases, these supervisory institutions are increasingly irrelevant

or compromised. In Uganda, the government has sought to exploit divisions within the Muslim community, with the president playing rival factions in Kampala against each other. In Kenya, heavy handed counterterror tactics and a failure to address the diverse grievances of multiple Muslim communities appears to be leading to a more unified sense of collective persecution. In Senegal, many policymakers believe that the strength of the Sufi orders and a culture of religious tolerance will insulate the country from extremism, although others warn that the state has been too complacent in this regard. The long-term effectiveness of these various strategies are uncertain. In a number of instances both religious leaders and governments are looking across the continent to share experiences and lessons learned in countering extremism and radicalization.

Country Case Studies

The case studies in this report are not intended as comprehensive histories of political-religious interaction. Rather, each author has chosen one or two dimensions intended to illustrate how politics and religion have shaped each other over time and how political liberalization and social dynamics are affecting the evolution of those relationships. The study includes countries from East and West Africa. Two, Senegal and Niger, have Muslim majorities; two, Uganda and Kenya, have Christian majorities but with significant Muslim communities; and two, Nigeria and Tanzania, have roughly equal Muslim and Christian populations.

In the first chapter, Jennifer Cooke examines how Senegal's powerful Sufi brotherhoods have helped insulate a maturing Senegalese state against potentially destabilizing popular pressures, but at the same time given some voice and protection to the country's largely rural populations. Demographic change, a more diverse set of religious voices, and the advent of competitive politics is putting this long-standing and largely collaborative relationship between state and religious leaders under strain. Cooke argues that the political culture of negotiation and compromise that grew out of the interaction, along with the maturation of a politically engaged civil society will serve Senegal well as it grapples with the many economic and political challenges it currently faces.

In Chapter 2, David Throup looks at how Kenya's diverse Christian institutions, largely (but not entirely) united in the struggle for democracy during the 1980s and 1990s, became fragmented along ethnic and political lines with the advent of competitive multiparty politics in 2000, and how mainline churches lost considerable moral authority by entangling themselves in divisive political debates in the decade that followed. The rapid rise of new Pentecostal and Prosperity Gospel churches has further challenged the influence of traditional mission churches, although as yet, they have largely kept out of the political fray. Throup further describes how Kenya's diverse and divided Muslim communities may increasingly feel a sense of collective grievance because of long-standing political marginalization, a tendency that is reinforced by a perception that the government's counterterror approach is unfairly and indiscriminately targeting them.

In Chapter 3, Richard Downie describes the important social influence that religious leaders wield in Uganda's deeply religious and conservative society. He notes the vulnerability of religious institutions to co-option and coercion in an authoritarian state where the office of the president, the ruling party, and the military are the most important institutions. A combination of patronage and subtle and not-so-subtle threats has kept all but a few authorities from challenging the state, restricting them to areas of engagement considered nonthreatening.

In Chapter 4, M. Sani Umar describes the delicate balance that must be continually struck in Nigeria to ensure that no one regional, ethnic, or religious community feels chronically excluded from political representation. The "politics of ethno-religious balancing," considered crucial to preserving Nigeria's federal character, has become even more salient as democratic space has expanded. Getting the balance right is complex because the multiple identities—religious, ethnic, and regional—overlap and diverge in complicated ways. The rise of reformist and revivalist groups, which are often less interested in inter- or intra-faith dialogue or collaboration, adds yet another challenge to managing the country's sectarian divisions.

Sebastian Elischer, in Chapter 5, describes efforts by successive governments in Niger to work in collaboration with Islamic authorities through state-led supervisory organizations to stave off the potential threat of political or jihadi Islamist influence. Elischer credits the Nigerien government with allowing peaceful integration of quietist Salafist groups into the country's social fabric, but points to the challenge of curbing potential extremism while preserving democratic principles.

Finally, in Chapter 6, Richard Downie points to the increasing assertiveness of religious groups in Tanzania as political competition intensifies and the party that has ruled since independence is challenged by an increasingly organized vocal opposition. To date the majority of religious actors have remained wary of embroiling themselves too deeply in political affairs, partly out of respect for the country's secular foundations, a history of ethnic and religious harmony, and a generally strong sense of national identity. Declining state performance and increasing political liberalization, however, have led more citizens to actively challenge inequalities and demand better governance. In an increasing number of cases, demands are couched in religious terms.

Implications for U.S. Policy

The evolving religious landscape in these countries, and in Africa more broadly, suggests a number of implications for U.S. engagement. The U.S. government often turns to traditional leaders as sources of social influence on issues such as childhood vaccines, reducing HIV stigma, and combating violence against women. They are viewed as key players in crisis and conflict mediation, provision of services, non-violence, and inter-religious harmony. Yet as the authority of traditional religious leaders is challenged and the religious arena becomes more diffuse and complex, the U.S. government may need to engage new

interlocutors who wield influence among increasingly young and urbanized populations, but who also may be less inclined to engage with their own political leaders, much less U.S. diplomatic or development personnel.

Related to this first challenge will be the need for a more broad and nuanced understanding of religious institutions and trends in individual states, and of the diversity of players and perceptions within each of the major religions. Given the important role that political and historical contexts play in shaping religious dynamics and institutions, transnational extrapolations about religious denominations or ideologies will, in many cases, lead to overly simplistic conclusions. Terms like “fundamentalist” or “Salafist” are often accompanied by overly broad (and usually negative) assumptions and associations, reinforcing stereotypes and unhelpful narratives that distinguish between “good” and “bad” Muslims.

An additional challenge will be to figure out how best to engage with states that are seeking to manage, police, or contain religious extremist elements. What can the United States learn from these varied efforts? How should it square the legitimate aim of African governments to prevent and mitigate violent extremism with the democratic principles—including religious freedom and freedom of expression—that the U.S. government supports? What models are yielding results, and how can lessons-learned best be shared among African states? Many of these efforts are just beginning—in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Nigeria, for example. How these countries might learn from more established models—in Niger, Morocco, and Tunisia, for example—warrants further research and examination.

Finally, the role of education came up repeatedly during the research as an area of opportunity and challenge, and a sector in which national governments and donor states alike should invest greater focus and resources. In many cases, a bifurcated education system—comprising a national, secular system on the one hand and a traditional Islamic system on the other—is the source of considerable worry, as children emerge from these systems with disparities in their preparedness to participate in a modern, globalized economy, disparities that will sometimes reinforce religious divides. Many of those interviewed called for greater integration of these systems and greater investment in the quality of education provided in each. A number also called for the integration of subjects like civics and history in national curricula to help build societal and national cohesion as the political, religious, and social spheres become increasingly contested.

1 | Political and Religious Pluralism in Senegal

*Jennifer G. Cooke*¹

Overview

The interaction of religious and political institutions in Senegal has been a defining element of the country's political culture and democratic development. Since its independence in 1960, Senegal has enjoyed a reputation for political stability, open public debate, religious tolerance, and a gradual and largely peaceful consolidation of democratic norms and institutions—a notable exception in the highly volatile West African subregion. Although the country has seen moments of profound political and social malaise—and indeed crisis—these have ultimately been resolved, with few exceptions,² through political compromise and accommodation and have not fundamentally threatened national cohesion or the legitimacy of the state. Many Senegalese and scholars who have studied Senegal credit the pervasive influence of the country's powerful Sufi brotherhoods for this largely peaceful political trajectory, pointing to the role that religious leaders have played as mediators and interlocutors between citizens and state authorities.

The broad parameters of authority and interaction between religious and state institutions were developed in the colonial period, and the basic patterns of engagement—negotiated accommodation, reciprocity, and a strong element of patronage—have remained largely intact well into the postindependence period. The leaders of the Sufi orders have had a powerful incentive to minimize conflict between society and state, as they have sought to sustain the loyalty of their followers and at the same time maintain their influence with (and support from) the ruling elite. The brotherhoods have served as a buffer of sorts, insulating the state from potentially destabilizing popular pressures and at the same time constraining political actors from overstepping their authority. These relationships of

1. This report is based on fieldwork conducted in Senegal in February 2014. The author benefited greatly from the energetic assistance of Abdoul Aziz Dieng, who provided invaluable logistical and translation support, on-the-ground knowledge, and thoughtful insight. Individuals interviewed for this study included religious leaders, current and former politicians, political analysts and activists, academics, members of nongovernmental organizations, and others. The author is deeply grateful to them for generously sharing their time and insights.

2. The separatist movement in the Casamance region of Senegal (geographically separated from much of Senegal by Gambia) is not treated in this paper.

interdependence and reciprocity form the basis of a uniquely Senegalese “social contract” that has helped order social and political interaction and mitigate tension and conflict.

In recent years, however, these highly organized relationships are changing, and the compact that has guided interactions between religious orders, the state, and Senegalese society is becoming more diffuse and fragmented. Demographic change, an increasingly diverse set of religious voices, and a more open and competitive political playing field have opened up new dynamics and divisions within each realm. The highly structured interactions of patronage, collaboration, mediation, and dialogue—possible when there were two organized, relatively cohesive, and uncontested poles of authority—are giving way to more atomized, personalized relationships, as both religious and political actors compete for followers and seek to distinguish themselves from their peers.

A young, more urban, and globally connected citizenry is placing greater demands on the state for economic opportunity, accountability, and service delivery, and a more organized and politically engaged civil society is increasingly able to influence policy and electoral outcomes without recourse to intermediaries. And, as some Senegalese point out, there is less reticence in recent years to question the authority and moral standing of religious leaders in media and public debate. Charismatic religious figures—some of whom only loosely follow the precepts of the Sufi orders—are gaining followers in Senegal’s densely populated urban centers. And many Senegalese point to the growing influence of reformist or Salafist voices, although there is considerable debate on how much of a political or social challenge they will pose.

All these trends point to the possibility of a far more fractious religious and social dynamic that will be reflected in—and reinforced by—a more messy and divided political discourse. But will these centrifugal forces lead to social conflict or political instability? The Senegalese state will be increasingly challenged by mounting economic and political pressures, and the brotherhoods, which have played a vital role in social mediation and order, will likewise be challenged to remain relevant centers of moral authority in a changing society. Senegal’s continued exceptionalism is not guaranteed, and its leadership—both political and religious—cannot afford to be complacent. Nonetheless, there are many strengths that Senegal’s leaders and citizens can draw on. Among the most important of these is the political culture that has evolved in the interactions of state, religion, and society. These interactions, while rarely undertaken with the objective of expanding political pluralism and competition, have nonetheless helped create a history and habit of tolerance, debate, mediation, and compromise—which ultimately are the bedrock of democratic practice. Senegal’s leaders and citizens would do well to nurture and build on this history as political and public space becomes more competitive and fractious.

Senegal’s Religious Landscape: Some History

Islam was introduced to the region of present-day Senegal in the 10th century, initially spread by North African traders, and then by Islamic clerics and scholars who often served

in the courts of traditional kingdoms and lineages.³ Beginning in the 1600s, a series of militant Islamic reformers sought, with limited success, to conquer territories governed by traditional rulers and bring them under Islamic rule. The region of Futa Toro, which straddles the present-day border between northern Senegal and southern Mauritania, was twice brought under the control of a theocratic Islamist state—first, for a brief period in the 1670s, and then a century later with the conquest of the Denianke kingdom and establishment of an imamate. But these and similar efforts at violent jihadi conquest failed to gain significant or enduring traction, as internal divisions and conflict with traditional kingdoms and states (both Muslim and non-Muslim) thwarted consolidation and expansion of reformist control.

With the end of the slave trade in the mid-1800s, French traders, who had largely confined themselves to bases on the Senegambian coast, began to expand inland, as agricultural production—mainly in acacia gum and peanuts—began to replace slaving as the mainstay of the colonial economy. French colonial forces put an end to the long and violent period of conflict and contestation among jihadi reformers and traditional kingdoms, crushing the former and defeating or co-opting the latter. By the turn of the twentieth century the French military had effectively suppressed militant jihadists as well as other forms of armed resistance to colonial rule in Senegal.

Amid the violence and tumult of the late 1800s, the period also saw the rise of a “new generation”⁴ of Islamic leaders—most notable among them Amadou Bamba Mbacké, Malick Sy, and Abdoulaye Niasse—scholars and reformers who rejected (or came to reject) both secular authorities and armed jihadists, urging their followers instead to peaceful resistance to colonial conquest and an inward, personal struggle for spiritual reform. Amadou Bamba founded the Mouride order in 1883, centered in the town of Touba; Malick Sy and Abdoulaye Niasse founded branches of the Tijaniyya order, with centers in the towns of Tivouane and Kaolack, respectively.

The spread of Islam in Senegal accelerated under colonial rule (more than at any other period in its history⁵), aided by the end of violent conflict and the expanding rail and road infrastructure provided by French colonials,⁶ as well as by popular antipathy to the French occupation.⁷ With traditional structures of political authority destroyed and the population under occupation by foreign forces, many Senegalese turned to Islam and the brotherhoods, as one scholar notes, to fill “a political and spiritual void left by the collapse of the old aristocratic political order.”⁸ As membership of the brotherhoods grew, France grew apprehensive of the popularity of their charismatic leaders. Despite their vocal rejection of

3. Sakah Saidu Mahmud, *Sharia or Shura: Contending Approaches to Muslim Politics in Nigeria and Senegal* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013).

4. John Glover, *Sufism and Jihad in Modern Senegal* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2007).

5. Ibid.

6. Andrew F. Clark, “Imperialism, Independence, and Islam in Senegal and Mali,” *Africa Today* 46, no. 3/4 (Summer/Autumn, 1999): 149–167.

7. Sheldon Gellar, *Democracy in Senegal: Tocquevillian Analytics in Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

8. Ibid., 33.

armed resistance, both Bamba and Niasse were sent into exile for long periods before returning to their communities in 1910. Upon their return, these leaders struck a bargain with French administrators, effectively pledging not to challenge the authority of the secular colonial state, and in exchange being guaranteed a high level of religious autonomy for the brotherhoods and a degree of social and economic authority within their community of followers. This bargain laid the foundation for state-religious relations that shaped Senegal's political development over the next century.

Today, Senegal is a predominantly Muslim society, with some 95 percent of its 13 million citizens followers of Islam. Of these an estimated 92 percent are disciples of one of four Sufi orders: Tijaniyya, Mouride, Qadiriyyah, and Layene. The Tijaniyya is the largest order (comprising roughly half of Senegal's Muslim population) with followers divided among several branches, the two largest based on the lineages of Malick Sy and Abdoulaye Niasse. The Tijaniyya have traditionally had a strong urban base and a strong emphasis on education. The Mouride order, whose leadership is based on the lineage of Amadou Bamba, has a slightly smaller following (with roughly a third of the Muslim community), but the order is generally considered more cohesive and structured, and therefore more politically influential than the Tijaniyya. Traditionally, the Mouride population base was in rural Senegal, although the order has expanded significantly, with a strong urban presence and a large international diaspora. Two smaller orders are the Qadiriyyah, the oldest order in Senegal, comprising some 6 percent of the Muslim population; and the Layene order, with an estimated 1 percent.

Each brotherhood is led by a Khalifa Général (or Grand Marabout). The position is hereditary, passed on to direct descendants of the order's founder—generally from brother to brother and then to the next generation. Beyond the Khalifa Général is a network of spiritual leaders—marabouts or shaykhs—who interact more regularly with their disciples, serving as guides and teachers. Like the khalifas, the marabouts derive their spiritual authority from their lineage and blood relationship with the order's founder.⁹ Followers of the brotherhoods (*talibés*) pledge absolute allegiance and obedience to their marabout, in exchange for his blessings and spiritual counsel. In practice, however, many other factors play into this bond, as will be discussed, and a follower's promise of submission is far more conditional than the pledging ceremony would suggest.¹⁰ Disciples are generally strongly loyal to their marabout, but followers can retract or change their allegiance without formal cost or consequence.

9. Leonardo A. Villalón, *Islamic Society and State Power in Senegal: Disciples and Citizens in Fatick* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 129. According to Villalón, anyone can declare himself a marabout and develop a following, but in practice marabouts of any stature are descendants of the founders or other Islamic heroes of the late 1800s and early 1900s.

10. Donal B. Cruise O'Brien, *Saints and Politicians: Essays in the Organisation of a Senegalese Peasant Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 124.

State-Religious Relations: The Evolution of Senegal's Social Compact

The accommodation reached between state and religious authorities in the early 1900s evolved into an enduring relationship of reciprocity and interdependence that lasted well into the postindependence period. Symbiosis between state and religious authorities is not unique to Senegal, as other case studies in this report illustrate. But the unusual degree of economic and commercial autonomy that Senegal's brotherhoods have enjoyed, as well as their pervasive and structured connections with society make the Senegalese model a particularly fascinating case, as the breadth of scholarly work on the country's social compact attests.¹¹ The necessity of maintaining the delicate balance between state patrons and their own followers provided the brotherhoods' leadership a strong incentive to maintain social and political cohesion and to mediate tensions between state and society, positioning them, in the words of a Tijaniyya spokesman, as "fire-fighters in the political arena."¹²

RECIPROCITY AND THE COLONIAL STATE

The power of the brotherhoods, as noted, expanded rapidly under colonial rule, and France, having overcome its doubts about the marabouts' political ambitions, came to rely on the brotherhoods and their charismatic leaders to maintain social order among Senegal's largely rural peasant populations. The brotherhoods helped to convey and ensure adherence to colonial edicts, and, particularly with the Mouride order, to expand and intensify the production of peanuts, the principal cash crop of colonial Senegal. Mouride marabouts became powerful players in the peanut economy, organizing collective farms cultivated by young followers, benefiting from tributes of labor from their adult followers, and emphasizing the moral obligation of hard work and obedience (a spiritual tenet that coincidentally redounded to the economic benefit of the order).

Within this arrangement, the marabouts were able to accumulate considerable wealth and economic autonomy, benefiting from a vast pool of low-cost (sometimes no-cost) labor and receiving land, machinery, and seed from the colonial state in return for their cooperation. Beyond the purely economic relationship, the colonial government publicly acknowledged the marabouts' authority, and provided support for construction of mosques and schools, funding for pilgrimages to Mecca, and financing for the development of the holy cities.¹³ The colonial government occasionally intervened in succession controversies within

11. Among the seminal works on Senegal's compact are Cruise O'Brien, *Saints and Politicians*; Villalón, *Islamic Society and State Power in Senegal*; David Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania, 1890–1920* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000).

12. "Serigne Abdoul Aziz Sy Junior—Porte-parole du Khalife général de la confrérie de la Tijanya du Sénégal: 'Nous sommes les sapeurs-pompiers du jeu politique,'" Seneweb.com, December 8, 2007, http://www.seneweb.com/news/Societe/serigne-abdoul-aziz-sy-junior-porte-parole-du-khalife-g-n-ral-de-la-confr-rie-de-la-tijanya-du-s-n-gal-nous-sommes-les-sapeurs-pompiers-du-jeu-politique_n_13642.html.

13. Linda J. Beck, *Brokering Democracy in Africa: The Rise of Clientelist Democracy in Senegal* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

the brotherhoods to tip the balance in favor of their preferred candidate, and conversely the marabouts became increasingly influential in lending legitimacy to political leaders. The collaborative nature of the relationship was quickly established. Marabouts recruited troops drawn from among their followers to fight for France during World War I. In 1918, less than 10 years after his return from French-imposed exile, Amadou Bamba was awarded the French Cross of the Legion of Honor.¹⁴

CONDITIONAL COLLABORATION IN THE POSTINDEPENDENCE PERIOD

The collaborative relationship continued into the postindependence period. Senegal's first president, Leopold Sedar Senghor, a Catholic, was particularly successful in courting the brotherhoods. Senghor was a proponent of the secular state—and indeed secularism has been firmly embedded in every iteration of Senegal's constitution—but, recognizing the social power of the brotherhoods, he was careful to distinguish Senegal's version of *laïcité* from that of France, which was considered to actively oppose the influence of religion or religious leaders in political affairs. Senghor instead advocated a model in which religions were welcomed by the state in an atmosphere of respect and tolerance,¹⁵ without favor or discrimination among them.

Senghor himself benefited considerably from the role that religion and religious leaders played in shaping public and political opinion. As voting rights extended to rural communities in the immediate preindependence period,¹⁶ the brotherhoods became increasingly influential in mobilizing votes, issuing religious edicts (*ndigels*) to their followers to vote in support of Senghor's accession to the French National Assembly, and later in support of his presidential campaigns. Senghor ran unopposed in all but one of his five presidential bids, but brotherhood support nonetheless helped bolster his perceived legitimacy and authority among rural populations. When Senghor's prime minister, Mamadou Dia, attempted a constitutional coup in 1962, the marabouts, who viewed Dia's agricultural reforms as a threat to brotherhoods' position within the commercial economy, rallied swiftly to support the president.¹⁷ When student protests and union strikes threatened the government in 1968, the Mouride leadership again strongly supported Senghor, sending hundreds of disciples to Dakar to protect the government.¹⁸ The collaborative nature of the relationship thereby helped insulate Senghor and the one-party state from opposition forces, at times mediating internal rifts within the party, helping co-opt potential outliers, and more

14. David Robinson, "Beyond Resistance and Collaboration: Amadu Bamba and the Murids of Senegal," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 21, no. 2 (May 1991): 149–171.

15. Souleymane Bachir Diagne, "A Secular Age and the World of Islam," in *Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal*, ed. Mamadou Diouf (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 36–50.

16. Senegal was unique in French colonial Africa, in that members of a small elite, based in four coastal "communes," were granted French citizenship and allowed to elect a representative to the French National Assembly. Suffrage was extended inland in the late 1940s.

17. Beck, *Brokering Democracy in Africa*.

18. Cheikh Anta Babou, "The Senegalese 'Social Contract' Revisited: The Muridiyya Muslim Order and State Politics," in *Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal*, ed. Mamadou Diouf (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 125–146.

broadly, given their strong hold over the agricultural and agrarian communities, preventing opposition forces from gaining “anchorage” in rural society.¹⁹

The collaborative relationship of mutual benefit between state and religious institutions has not been unconditional. Rather, it is tempered by a second set of important relationships—those between the brotherhoods and their followers. While the leaders of the orders had a strong vested interest in maintaining close and remunerative ties with Senegal’s political leadership, they had an equal interest in maintaining the allegiance of their followers. Political leaders value religious leaders only insofar as they can command the loyalty and discipline of their followers. And that loyalty derives largely from the moral authority and charisma of a particular khalifa or marabout, as well as from deliverables, whether tangible or intangible, that they offer followers. These deliverables include spiritual guidance, a social and economic safety net, and, to some extent, protection from—and influence with—the state. Marabouts therefore cannot afford to be entirely co-opted by the political leadership, nor can they negotiate solely in their own interest. They must also be seen as championing the well-being of their followers.

In a number of instances, religious leaders pushed back hard on the state in defense of their adherents. Abdou Lahat, for example, who became leader of the Mouride in 1968, did not initially enjoy the status and reputation of his charismatic predecessor, and tensions with other key figures within the brotherhood hierarchy weakened his support base within the order and his perceived authority among followers. In the economic crises of the 1970s, Lahat became an ardent critic of government policies and an advocate for rural populations hard hit by drought and artificially low producer prices. He adopted a far more confrontational, even hostile, relationship with the Senghor state,²⁰ encouraging peanut producers to evade the rapacious state marketing board by smuggling goods across the border or by reverting to subsistence farming. His confrontational stance won him the strong support of rural farmers, and the Senghor government eventually relented, doubling producer prices and canceling farmer debt to the marketing board. In a bid to placate the khalifa, the government moreover offered 2,500 acres in land to Lahat²¹ and built a major new marketplace in Touba.²² Lahat’s popularity among rural communities soared, thus consolidating his power base within the Mouride organization. He went on to have a far more conciliatory relationship with the government of Senghor’s successor Abdou Diouf.²³

19. Aminata Diaw and Mamadou Diouf, “Senegalese Opposition and its Quest for Power,” in *The Politics of Opposition in Contemporary Africa*, ed. Adebayo O. Olukoshi (Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 1998), 119.

20. Lucy Creevey Behrman, “Muslim Politics and Development in Senegal,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 15, no. 2 (June 1977): 261–277.

21. Beck, *Brokering Democracy in Africa*, 78.

22. Catherine Boone, *Merchant Capital and the Roots of State Power in Senegal, 1930–1985* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

23. Babou, “The Senegalese ‘Social Contract’ Revisited.”

REFORMIST CRITICS OF THE COMPACT

The relationship between state and brotherhoods was not without critics, and among the most vocal challengers over time have been Islamic reformist leaders. In the preindependence period, a number of Islamic organizations emerged to challenge both the colonial state and the marabouts, who were seen as corrupt collaborators within the French system and whose practices were deemed in some instances to deviate from a more purist interpretation of Islam. Among the most prominent of these reformist groups was the Islamic Cultural Union (ITI; Ittihad ath Thaqafi al Islami), which emerged in the early 1950s and gained considerable support among urban youth. The ITI openly criticized the marabouts, but much of its energy was directed against repressive French policies, seeking to expand space for discussion and dissemination of Islamic principles. A primary goal of the ITI was to modernize Islamic education with the establishment of Franco-Arab schools, which integrated some secular studies, including French, along with Arabic and Qur'anic studies.²⁴ Many of Senegal's independence leaders (including Senghor) supported ITI's education agenda as well as its resistance to French restrictions on Islamic organizations. The group's political agenda, which had a strong anticolonial slant, was therefore somewhat diluted after independence. Further, few within the new government were willing to support the ITI against the interests of the powerful and well-resourced brotherhoods, and ultimately the ITI was weakened and its leadership divided. Importantly, the reformist movement was not entirely crushed or marginalized by the Senghor or Diouf government; rather both governments sought to integrate elements of the movement into government, with support for reformist causes (like education) and charitable projects.²⁵ "By permitting Islamic activists to function openly," writes scholar Alexander Thurston, "the regime prevented their radicalization along political lines."²⁶

Democratization, Social Change, and the Fragmentation of the Social Compact

The relationship of reciprocity and balance that bound state and religious institutions withstood Senegal's transition from colony to independent state intact, and the arrangement remained firmly entrenched in the first decades of the postindependence period. Over time, however, three broad and mutually reinforcing trends began to reconfigure the interactions of state and religious actors, namely changes in the political, religious, and socio-demographic spheres. The quasi-institutionalized interaction of political and religious leadership has become far more difficult to maintain as political and religious

24. See Roman Loimeier, "L'Islam ne se vend plus: The Islamic Reform Movement and the State in Senegal," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 30, no. 2 (May 2000): 174–175. Schools run by the marabouts taught only the Qur'an, by rote.

25. Ibid.

26. Alexander Thurston, "Why Is Militant Islam a Weak Phenomenon in Senegal?," Working Paper No. 09-005 (Roberta Buffett Center for International and Comparative Studies, Northwestern University, March 2009).

authority is increasingly contested, as political and democratic space expands, and as the expectations—and frustrations—of a young and rapidly urbanizing population rise.

In the political arena, a more open and competitive playing field has made electoral transitions more uncertain, and the advent of political choice has exposed differences—of interest and ideology—among religious leaders and the broader electorate. Although the country has been touted as a long-standing democracy, Senegal's transition to competitive politics has in fact been a process of incremental compromise and liberalization, managed by an often reluctant centralized state in response to mounting domestic pressures. Senegal was a one-party state from 1965 to 1975,²⁷ when, in addition to the incumbent Parti Socialiste (PS), the Senghor government authorized two additional parties, each mandated to represent an officially designated ideological tendency—one Marxist, one Democratic Liberal. Restrictions on the number of authorized parties were removed by President Diouf in 1981.²⁸ A proliferation of parties ensued, although electoral rules and a weakly organized opposition helped ensure the hegemony of the PS, which remained in power until 2000. This gradual introduction of political pluralism and the fragmentation of political blocs have made the relationship of sustained and reliable reciprocity between political incumbents and religious leaders more uncertain. It has also opened up the possibility of political competitors exploiting religious divides and appealing to religious identity as a means of mobilization.

POLITICAL PLURALISM AND DIVIDED LOYALTIES

The first signs of strain emerged in the 1980s, with the lifting of multiparty restrictions and an incipient challenge to the dominance of the ruling PS. Public frustration had mounted during the economic crises and structural adjustment policies of the 1970s and 1980s, which took a toll on urban and rural populations alike. As disillusionment with the incumbent PS grew and support for opposition leader Abdoulaye Wade's Parti Démocratique Sénégalais (PDS) mounted, the marabouts found rifts opening up between themselves and their followers—and indeed among the marabouts themselves—over political preference.

In 1988, despite a very public and forceful electoral *ndigel* issued by Khalifa Général Lahat of the Mourides in support of incumbent Abdou Diouf, Wade made substantial gains in voter support—even in some areas of the Mouride heartland. Political options were dividing the electorate, and the possibility of real political choice emboldened many to disregard Lahat, an unprecedented snub to the authority of a khalifa général. In the words of political analyst Mody Niang, “the *talibés* were beginning to enfranchise themselves . . . they might follow their marabout on religious matters, but in the political sphere, they

27. In the immediate preindependence period, Senghor (and his eventual first prime minister, Mamadou Dia) formed the Bloc Démocratique Sénégalaise (BDS), which merged with a number of other parties to form a broad nationalist coalition, eventually renamed the Union Populaire Sénégalaise (UPS). Once Senghor acceded to power, other parties were variously co-opted, outlawed, or repressed, leaving the UPS predominant in a de facto one-party state. The UPS was renamed the Parti Socialiste (PS) in the 1970s.

28. This move by President Diouf may have been less about a genuine commitment to democracy than a tactic to divide a gradually consolidating opposition.

were not willing to surrender their power to choose.”²⁹ Facing the prospect of mounting *talibé* resistance to their edicts and the potential embarrassment of backing a losing candidate, the grands marabouts withdrew from giving direct public support to individual candidates, and 1988 was the last time a khalifa général issued an *ndigel*.³⁰

Few marabouts would dare to publicly contradict an electoral edict issued by a khalifa général,³¹ and therefore the retreat of the grands marabouts from direct involvement in electoral politics freed more junior (petits) marabouts to speak their minds and ally themselves with particular parties or candidates of their choosing.³² Without the heft of the full institutional hierarchy and with only a segment of a particular order’s following behind them, however, the influence of individual marabouts is more limited, and their utility to the state is likewise diminished. Like the khalifas, the petits marabouts risk losing their moral and spiritual standing by entangling themselves in partisan and personal politics. In 2000, Cheikh Modou Kara, a popular and somewhat controversial marabout, called on his supporters to support incumbent Diouf, predicting a landslide victory against Wade, who was at that time making his fifth run at the presidency. Kara’s public endorsement at a stadium in Dakar was booed by his own followers, an unprecedented public rebuff of a marabout by his *talibés*. In the event, Kara’s prediction of a Diouf win was proved wrong. He quickly threw his support behind the victorious Wade.

The fragmentation of political parties is likely to persist for some time, particularly since new parties have tended to spring up around individual personalities rather than around ideologies or policy platforms. Abdoulaye Wade was the perennial opposition leader, and for a long time the most visible and obvious standard bearer for challengers to PS dominance. Today, the configuration of alliances is less certain. The 2012 elections pitted Wade against 13 opposition candidates, with no clear indication of who would prevail. A number of the candidates had served in Wade’s government, but after falling out with the president went on to form their own parties. Macky Sall, one of Wade’s former prime ministers, proved the strongest opposition candidate (with 27 percent to Wade’s 35 percent in the first round) and in the subsequent runoff the opposition united behind him in a new coalition—Benno Bokk Yaakaar (United in Hope). Sall soundly defeated Wade (66 percent to 34), but like Wade before him, does not fully control the coalition that brought him to power—a coalition that includes many experienced and ambitious personalities in its ranks. Going forward, the uncertainty and fluidity of coalition politics will make throwing support behind individual candidates something of a gamble. Individual marabouts

29. Author interview with Mody Niang, Dakar, February 2014.

30. In 1993 the leaders of the brotherhoods spoke out in support of peace and calm but remained silent on candidate selection. See Leonardo Villalón, “Generational Changes, Political Stagnation, and the Evolving Dynamics of Religion and Politics in Africa,” *Africa Today* 46, no. 3/4 (Summer/Autumn 1999): 129–147. In 2000, the khalifa général of the Tijaniyya predicted a first round victory for Diouf but refrained from issuing an *ndigel*. See Mody Niang, *M^e Wade et L’alternance: le rêve brisé du Sopi* (Dakar: Niang, 2004), 124.

31. In 1988, a young marabout, nephew of Khalifa Général Abdou Lahat, spoke out against Abdou Diouf’s reelection, contravening his uncle’s *ndigel*. Three days later, he publicly apologized, saying “I was mistaken. It is Abdou Diouf who must be supported.” Beck, *Brokering Democracy in Africa*, 93.

32. *Ibid.*, 67.

seeking to do so will make different calculations on the odds of backing a winner, thereby diffusing their collective support across the electoral field.

RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AS A WEDGE ISSUE

In a turn that alarmed many Senegalese, the advent of competitive politics also prompted the use of religious identity as an instrument of mobilization and a political wedge issue. Wade came to office as part of a coalition that he did not fully control, and he sought in a very overt way to use religion and the brotherhoods—and particularly the Mouride order (of which he is a member)—to ensure his base. Days after his election, the newly elected president shocked many Senegalese by very publicly kneeling down before the leader of the Mourides in an ostentatious display of obeisance, delivering what many considered a pointed indication about where his loyalties lay. Wade made frequent reference to his membership in the Mouride order, and was extravagant in his support to its leadership. Throughout his tenure, he lavished vast sums on infrastructure and development in Touba, handing out cash, cars, and diplomatic passports to marabouts. Wade's manifest preference for the Mouride order left other orders feeling slighted and provoked angry critiques, including an unusually blunt rebuke from Khalifa Général Abdoul Aziz Sy of the Tijaniyya order:

Tivouane is part of Senegal and has a right to a little consideration. I told the President of the Republic that the Tijaniyya are among those who elected him. We face up to our obligations like all citizens. Like all citizens, we have both responsibilities and rights. And we are demanding those rights.³³ [author's translation]

Wade's occasional disparaging remarks about Senegal's Christian minority community were likewise unprecedented. When the president's African Renaissance Monument (a 160-foot bronze sculpture of a scantily clad couple and a baby looking out to the sea) was criticized by some Muslim leaders as offensive and idolatrous, the president replied that Christians pray to a figure who is not God, and no one calls for the destruction of churches.³⁴ The archbishop of Dakar publicly declared his shock at Wade's remarks, and Christian protestors clashed with police in and around the city's cathedral compound. The president's numerous slights against the country's Christian minority prompted the Network of Islamic NGOs (ROIS; Réseaux des ONG Islamiques) to publicly remind him of his "constitutional obligations" of neutrality on religion "to preserve understanding between Muslims and Christians in Senegal."³⁵

Wade's efforts to instrumentalize religious divides were widely criticized in Senegal, and his successor Macky Sall has been careful to avoid perceptions of favoritism. "We have

33. Mody Niang, *Le Clan de Wade: Accaparement, Mépris et Vanité* (Dakar: Editions Sentinelles, 2011), 55.

34. "Pour les musulmans, les églises, c'est pour prier quelqu'un qui n'est pas Dieu. Ils prient Jésus Christ dans les églises, tout le monde le sait, mais . . . est-ce qu'ils (les imams, ndlr) ont jamais dit de casser les églises?" Quoted in "Wade jou avec le feu sacré," *Jeune Afrique*, January 6, 2010, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20100106182425/s-n-gal-violences-pr-sident-r-ligionwade-joue-avec-le-feu-sacr.html>.

35. Ibid.

a republic that is democratic and secular in which freedom of worship must continue to be guaranteed,” said Sall prior to his runoff with Wade. “I refuse to enter into artificial debates to know if there is a Tidjian vote or a Mouride vote that will favor me, since that risks creating a religious divide that doesn’t exist in Senegal.”³⁶ It was almost three years into his tenure that the media “revealed” that President Sall was a member of the Tijaniyya order.³⁷

PROLIFERATION OF RELIGIOUS VOICES AND THE COMPETITION FOR FOLLOWERS AND PATRONS

Like the political sphere, the religious realm has become more fractured and diverse, with more—and more varied—actors competing for influence. Because spiritual authority within the brotherhoods is passed on to the descendants of the orders’ founders, the number of marabouts—now the grandsons and great-grandsons of the first khalifas—has grown exponentially. The profusion of marabouts has intensified competition among them for adherents, state patronage, political leverage, and, in the immediate families of the grand marabouts, leadership.

Within the brotherhoods, the competition for followers has given rise to a number of charismatic religious entrepreneurs seeking to distinguish themselves and expand their share of adherents in an increasingly crowded marketplace. Among the most widely known are Modou Kara and Cheikh Bethio Thioune. Kara has rallied thousands of young urban followers around the Bamba Fepp (Bamba Is Everywhere) movement, which ostensibly celebrates the teachings and personality of Mouride founder Amadou Bamba. Bethio Thioune until recently led thousands of Thiantacounes in all night co-ed celebrations that included dancing, singing, and prodigious amounts of food and drink. Bethio, who is not directly related to a religious lineage, has also been an outspoken advocate for reform within the brotherhoods, arguing that leadership should be open to a wider pool of candidates. “These movements say very little about religion or Allah,” says historian Penda Mbow, “and are much more focused on personalities and ambitions than spiritual matters.”³⁸

Other religious leaders have sought to become more active advocates for the issues of greatest immediate relevance to their followers. The brotherhoods have played an important and positive role in speaking out on HIV/AIDS education and prevention, in combating female genital mutilation, and in helping drive attention and resources to rural development. A new kind of religious leader is emerging, say some Senegalese, more attuned to the daily realities of people in their surrounding communities. Some point to leaders like Youssoupha Sarr, who in 2008 led marches in the suburbs of Dakar to protest the rising

36. Macky Sall, “Il ne faut pas créer des fractures pour gagner les elections,” *La Croix*, March 11, 2012, http://www.la-croix.com/Actualite/Monde/Macky-Sall-il-ne-faut-pas-creer-des-fractures-pour-gagner-les-elections_EP_-2012-03-11-777228.

37. “Révélations: ‘Le Président Macky Sall n’est pas un mouride, il est plutôt de la confrérie Tidiane’” (Lettre du continent), *Times24 Info*, January 30, 2015, <http://times24.info/revelations-le-president-macky-sall-nest-pas-un-mouride-il-est-plutot-de-la-confrerie-tidiane-lettre-du-continent/>.

38. Author interview with Penda Mbow, Dakar, February 2014.

costs of electricity.³⁹ With other local imams, Sarr has periodically called on followers to cease payments to the national power company, a call for civil disobedience reminiscent of Abdou Lahat's calls in the 1970s for peasant civil resistance against the state marketing board, albeit on a smaller scale.

In addition to competing for followers, individual marabouts may also seek to curry political influence and more direct lines of patronage with individual political players. Kara, after his failed *ndigel* for President Diouf in 2000, became one of President Wade's most ardent supporters, able to mobilize huge crowds of young men to join pro-Wade rallies. Both he and Bethio issued electoral *ndigels* in support of Wade in 2012. Followers of both these leaders have occasionally clashed with security forces, serving as protection squads (and some say intimidation forces) for their erstwhile political patron. Following Wade's defeat in 2012, Bethio was tried and imprisoned for his alleged complicity in two murders committed by his followers at one of his residences and his religious and political activities were restricted. Kara has remained a friend to Wade and become a counselor and a staunch defender of Wade's son Karim, who is currently serving a six-year sentence for corruption. He has nonetheless recently vowed to support Macky Sall's presidency as well.

POLITICAL AMBITION AND MORAL AUTHORITY

Although parties explicitly based on religion are prohibited, several religious leaders, including Kara, are moving more directly into the political realm, establishing parties or running as candidates themselves. Kara formed his own party in 2004: his Party for Truth and Development (PVD) currently has two seats in the National Assembly. The Movement for Reform and Development (MRDS), founded by Imam Mbaye Niang, is considered by many to be Islamist in outlook and has two seats in the National Assembly. Prominent marabout Sy Djamil founded the Bes du Nakk (Citizen Movement for National Reform), which currently has four seats in the National Assembly. Some observers worry that these parties may signal a tilt toward the Islamization of politics, although others point out that this is how democracy works—a handful of assembly seats does not signal an erosion of support for secularism. It is not entirely clear how the religious background of these politicians will affect their policy decisions or their religious standing. Kara today, for example, is seen by many Senegalese as more of a political opportunist than a spiritual leader; there is speculation that he may run for the presidency himself in 2017. “You can be a very good religious leader, and you can be a very clever politician,” said a program officer with a governance advocacy group in Dakar. “But it is very hard to be both.”⁴⁰

The increasing assertiveness of younger marabouts on religious and political matters has challenged the traditional religious hierarchy. It has also entailed a loss of central control and discipline and to some extent has undermined the coherence and consistency

39. “Senegal: Local Imams Call for Civil Disobedience,” embassy cable, U.S. Embassy Dakar, December 19, 2008, <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/WL0812/S00604/cablegate-senegal-imams-call-for-civil-disobedience.htm>.

40. Author interview with Moussa Mbaye, executive secretary of Environnement et Développement du Tiers Monde (ENDA), Dakar, February 2014.

of the brotherhoods' moral and spiritual messages. For some Senegalese, the sheer number of people claiming maraboutic authority has detracted somewhat from the mystique. "All these petits marabouts, getting involved in politics, getting involved in little scandals, driving around in big cars—it hurts the brand," says independent journalist and magazine editor Mansour Dieng.⁴¹ Critiques have arisen from within the brotherhoods as well. "Today, commercialism and elitism significantly affect the ability of the brotherhoods to mobilize," according to Fallou Dieng, head of the Circle of Sufi Intellectuals. "The regrettable intrusion into the political arena by Sufi religious leaders trapped by the lure of power may lead to an unprecedented erosion of the aura of Sufi marabouts in the eyes of the people."⁴² Several interviewed for this report see this erosion of "aura" and moral authority as an opening for the expansion of reformist influences.

REFORMIST CHALLENGERS TO THE SUFI ORDERS

Reformist influences in Senegal, which have waxed and waned since the colonial period, may be gaining greater traction today, although there is considerable difference of opinion on how great a challenge they pose to the brotherhoods and to the secular state. Reformist movements have emanated both from within the Sufi orders and from Salafist organizations, a number of which were founded by scholars who had studied abroad. To date, these influences have had their strongest base among urban intellectuals and university students, although it is increasingly common to see conservative religious dress in low-income suburbs of Dakar. Some analysts point to the proliferation across Senegal of mosques and other institutions built with funding from Salafist sources in Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Movements with their origins in the brotherhoods include the Dahiratoul Moustarchidine Wal Moustarchidaty, for example, which originated within the Tijaniyya brotherhood, and the Hizbut Tarqiyyah, which began among Mouride students at the University of Dakar.⁴³ Both these movements emphasize reformist principles, but within the tradition and framework of the brotherhoods.⁴⁴ Members of the Moustarchidine had a brief period of intense political activism in the early 1990s (the group was temporarily banned in 1994, after violence at an opposition rally left six police dead), but their involvement was seen by many as having more to do with leadership conflicts and opposition politics than with political Islam.

The Jama'atou Ibadou Rahmane (JIR) is among the most prominent reform movements that draws on Salafist influences. The organization places strong emphasis on education,

41. Author interview with Mansour Dieng, Dakar, February 2014.

42. "Entretien avec Serigne Fallou Dieng, président des intellectuels soufi," Dakaractu.com, November 22, 2014, http://www.dakaractu.com/Entretien-avec-Serigne-Fallou-Dieng-president-des-intellectuels-soufis-Les-politiciens-controlent-la-cour-des-khalifes_a79029.html.

43. Leonardo A. Villalón, "Negotiating Islam in the Era of Democracy: Senegal in Comparative Regional Perspective," in *Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal*, ed. Mamadou Diouf (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 239–266.

44. Dahiratoul Moustarchidine Wal Moustarchidaty, "Document final de la XIIIème édition des universités du Ramadan organisées par le Dahiratoul Moustarchidine Was Moustarchidaty avant propos," <http://moustarchidine.com/index.php/home/ur/73-document-final-de-la-xiiieme-edition-des-universites-du-ramadan-organisees-par-le-dahiratoul-moustarchidine-wal-moustarchidaty-avant-propos>.

social welfare programs, and dissemination of Islamic principles and practices within Senegalese society. In its early days, the JIR was considered more inflexible and stringent in its approach, but today—perhaps in acknowledgment of popular resistance—seeks to persuade and inform (according to its public pronouncements) rather than to impose its views or condemn those who do not share them.⁴⁵

Reformist groups have largely stepped back from open criticism of brotherhoods. Indeed, while many of Senegal's campus mosques are led by Salafist imams, their congregations often include Sufis and Salafists praying side by side.⁴⁶ Relations with the brotherhoods and reformist organizations are respectful. JIR leaders, for example, are invited to join the major Mouride and Tijaniyya ceremonies and festivals; likewise, Sufi leaders are invited to JIR events. Nonetheless, some of those interviewed worried about the possibility of social divides opening up around religious identities as competing interpretations of religious purity and authenticity intensify. Beyond the reformist challenge to the brotherhoods, the expansion of Pentecostal churches has been of concern to Senegal's small and largely Catholic Christian community, with some Catholic leaders viewing these groups' loud public gatherings and assertive proselytizing efforts as possibly stirring up tensions in what has been a peaceful and respectful interfaith coexistence.

There is some debate on Senegal's vulnerability to Islamist ideologies (here signifying the belief that political authority derives its legitimacy only from Islam) or violent extremism. The expansion of terrorist groups operating in the name of Islam in neighboring Mauritania and Mali have given some urgency to that discussion. Many of those interviewed argue that the strength and pervasive influence of the brotherhoods will insulate Senegal's youth from these ideologies, which are foreign to Senegal's fundamentally peaceful and tolerant socio-religious culture. Others are less sanguine, warning that youth who feel alienated from the state and who see the traditional religious hierarchies as part of a corrupt and indifferent establishment may find more militant expressions of Islam attractive. It is unlikely that these ideologies will find broad traction, but as was often pointed out, it does not take large numbers of radicalized individuals to cause major social problems.

Few Senegalese anticipate a direct challenge to the secular nature of the state or to the respectful distance that has been maintained between the political and religious spheres. President Wade's unprecedented politicization of religious identity was met with widespread dismay; his attempt to remove the clause on *laïcité* in a draft constitution in 2001 generated a public outcry (and was quickly reinstated). There will continue to be debates over policy prescriptions that deal with morality and religious beliefs, issues associated with family law, sexuality, and sexual preference. These debates and tensions, as Senegal scholar Leonardo Villalón points out, are similar to those prevalent in

45. Jama'atou Ibadou Rahmane, "Présentation," <http://www.jironline.org/index.php/presentation>.

46. Author interview with Bakary Sambe, Dakar, February 2014.

many other democratic systems as well,⁴⁷ and particularly those with a largely conservative, deeply religious public. Education, as noted, may be among the more sensitive of these issues in both societal and political terms, but here, as in other areas, the state has sought a compromise position that balances the religiosity of the population with the principles of state secularism.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Senegalese society is changing. A young, increasingly urban population is more concentrated, more vocal, and more politically engaged. At independence in 1960, 23 percent of Senegal's population lived in cities; in 2013, more than 43 percent were urban, in a total population that grew from 3.1 million to 14.1 million in the same period.⁴⁸ Senegalese citizens have access to an expanding array of information and opinion, through news and social media that connect them with each other and with the global community. They are more educated on their rights and more willing to question authority—both religious and political. Even as the brotherhoods continue to play an enormously important role in social and spiritual life, Senegalese citizens are growing less reliant on religious interlocutors to convey popular interests to the state or guide their political choices.

Political liberalization and communication technologies have paved the way for a much more organized and influential civil society that in the last 15 years has played a critical role at moments of political transition. In the run-up to the 2012 elections, when the 86-year old Wade sought to extend his stay in office and position his son Karim as vice president (and therefore likely successor), the Senegalese public came together in a powerful way against his tactics.⁴⁹ During the crisis, Mouride and Tijaniyya khalifas called for calm, and reportedly sent delegates to quietly persuade the president to drop his proposals.⁵⁰ But it was groups like the African Assembly for the Defense of Human Rights (RADDHO; La

47. Leonardo A. Villalón, *Senegal: Assessing Risks to Stability* (Washington, DC: CSIS, June 2011), http://csis.org/files/publication/110623_Villalon_Senegal_Web.pdf.

48. World Bank, "World Bank Cross Country Data: Senegal: Urban population (% of total)," 2011, https://www.quandl.com/data/WORLDBANK/SEN_SP_URB_TOTL_IN_ZS-Senegal-Urban-population-of-total. More than 60 percent of the population is 24 years old or younger; Index Mundi, "Senegal Demographics Profile 2014," http://www.indexmundi.com/senegal/demographics_profile.html.

49. In a September 2009 Voice of America interview, President Wade announced his intention to run for a third term in office. Both the Constitution under which Wade was elected in 2000 and the 2001 Constitution adopted during his first term limited the president to two terms in office. Wade suggested that his reelection in 2007 counted as a first term under the new 2001 Constitution and that he was thus eligible to run in 2012. In June 2011, Wade proposed a change in electoral rules to lower the threshold for victory in the first round of the presidential election from over 50 percent to over 25 percent. This would likely preclude the possibility that opposition forces would unite against him in a second-round runoff. Additionally, Wade proposed the creation of an office of the vice president. This was widely seen as a ploy to create a post for his son Karim. The father/son presidential ticket would make the younger Wade the president's constitutional successor. These proposals provoked mass riots on June 23 (inspiring the M23 movement). Wade withdrew the latter two proposals; the Constitutional Court ultimately ruled that he could run for an additional term.

50. Alex Thurston, "In Senegal, Religious Leaders Join Constitutional Debate," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 24, 2011, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/Africa-Monitor/2011/0624/In-Senegal-religious-leaders-join-constitutional-debate>. Thurston points out that younger marabouts were divided on the issue. And while religious beliefs may have played some part in their positions, political calculations almost certainly did: "Openly supporting or opposing Wade could have consequences both for a marabout's relations with the state and his relations with his own disciples, and staying neutral has implications as well," Thurston notes.

Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme), founded by university faculty and researchers, and Y'en a Marre (Sick of It), whose members include rap music artists, journalists, youth organizations, and other activists; coalition movements like Touche Pas Ma Constitution (Don't Touch My Constitution); and the broad M23 movement that encompassed many of these groups as well as opposition parties that mobilized mass protests and brought regional and global attention to Wade's machinations. The Constitutional Court ultimately allowed Wade to run, but in the face of sustained mass protests (which left 10 people dead) and regional and international pressure, Wade backed off his other proposed changes. He was decisively defeated in the electoral runoff.

In today's context, religious leaders may not always find their mediation efforts welcomed by a more demanding public. When Karim Wade was arrested on corruption charges in 2013, a number of religious leaders, including, reportedly, the Mouride khalifa général, came to his defense, calling on the new government to drop the case. "The message from the marabouts was to leave Karim alone in the name of social peace," said a former senior government official. "But the Karim case was a test: 'social peace is good,' people say, 'but peace for peace's sake is not always right.' Citizens today are more educated on their rights, and people today are also demanding accountability."⁵¹

The success in 2012 of the M23 and its allied movements points to the growing power of citizen engagement in the political process, and the potential of civil society to take up the role of citizen advocacy that the brotherhoods have played in the past. Senegalese observers also warn of a large segment of the population that remains politically peripheral, with little access to quality education, frustrated by poor governance and lack of economic opportunity, and the indifference of the political elite. It is among this population, according to interviewees for this report, that charismatic religious voices will have the greatest appeal and influence, and where radical or militant ideologies may gain traction. "The world of the khalifas is very far away from the ordinary life of a poor, unemployed boy in Dakar. The brotherhoods will need to find ways to connect to that population in a more direct way," said political analyst Mody Niang.⁵²

There is some worry that Senegal's divided education system—with a largely secular, French-inspired curriculum in the formal system and a parallel informal system of basic Qur'anic schools (*daaras*)—may deepen the societal divide. Those educated only in the Qur'anic schools will have fewer options for employment, leaving them increasingly marginalized in a context of already limited economic opportunity. Beyond the quality of education provided, some worry that the bifurcated system of education and socialization fundamentally undercuts a sense of collective national identity and interest that ultimately will strain national cohesion. Calls for national standards and equity in education, however, come up against popular demand for religious education and the vested interests of marabout teachers. The government has sought to navigate these competing pressures by

51. Author interview with former minister of education and professor of law Ibrahima Fall, Dakar, February 2014.

52. Author interview with Mody Niang, Dakar, February 2014.

introducing voluntary religious education into public schools, establishing Franco-Arab schools within the public system, and encouraging efforts to modernize Qur'anic schools. These efforts at reform will take considerable time, and the quality of public education remains a source of deep concern for many Senegalese.

Today

Senegal stands out in West Africa for its stability and resilience as well as for its gradual and peaceful expansion of democratic norms and practice. Religious institutions have played an important role in the country's political history and development. Their considerable economic autonomy and social influence have enabled them to shape and limit the exercise of power by the Senegalese state and by its colonial predecessor. Their moral authority has enabled them to win the support and cooperation of large segments of the population. The role of religious institutions as buffers between society and the state—if not always undertaken in the spirit of democratic practice—has nonetheless moderated the potentially destabilizing impact of state overreach on the one hand and of popular resistance on the other. The history of negotiation and compromise, often mediated by religious leaders, has given breathing space to a maturing political system, while giving a modicum of voice and protection to a politically weak, largely rural, agrarian population.

In recent decades, political, religious, and social dynamics in Senegal are reshaping the country's political culture, leading to a more fractious and divided political and public discourse. Pluralism and competition in the political realm are mirrored in the religious realm, and the traditional sources of social order and cohesion are changing. A growing, increasingly urban population has been frustrated by sluggish economic growth and limited economic opportunities. Both religious and political authorities will come under increasing pressure to be attuned to the demands of a more insistent (and often dissatisfied) public. Democratization is still a work in progress, and state authority remains highly centralized in the executive office, with few strong institutionalized checks on presidential power. Corruption and patronage politics are still very much embedded in the political culture, although the administration of Macky Sall has taken some important, if controversial steps, to investigate and prosecute offenders. Political parties are highly fractured and personalized, and the incentive to use identity politics or wedge issues to mobilize constituencies will remain. Disparities in wealth and opportunity; possible divides among secular, traditional, and reformist voices; a bifurcated education system; and a surrounding subregion that has seen an expansion of militant extremism will mean that Senegal's leaders and citizens cannot be complacent about potentially destabilizing forces.

Although these pressures and dynamics will very likely put Senegal's long-standing social compact under increasing strain, there are a number of important elements of that compact that remain firmly intact. The broad popular mobilization during the 2012 election crisis and the alternation of ruling parties in 2000 and 2012 are strong testament to consolidation of democratic norms and expectations within Senegalese society. Senegal today remains a deeply religious society, and the country's Sufi brotherhoods remain

powerful players in the spiritual lives of their followers. Although their impact may be more indirect and diffuse as civil society expands and diversifies, religious leaders—both the khalifa généraux and activist marabouts—will almost certainly continue to have considerable influence in shaping public opinion and attitudes on public policy and on moral issues. Religious institutions—both Muslim and Catholic—will likely retain a strong position as mediators and as advocates of social peace, although they will find that an empowered opposition and citizenry will be less easily placated as demands for government accountability increase.

Relations between religious institutions and the state will likely remain positive as well. The accommodation reached between secular and religious authorities at the turn of the twentieth century and what political scientist Alfred Stepan calls the “rituals of respect”⁵³ that have reinforced it over time are deeply embedded in Senegal’s political culture. That history and culture of tolerance and accommodation is the source of considerable pride for many Senegalese. The hope for many Senegalese interviewed for this report is that these values will be protected and passed to younger generations through the actions and rhetoric of both political and religious leaders, and through an education system that strengthens the basic consensus and compromise that have been at the heart of Senegal’s exceptionalism and democratic consolidation.

53. Alfred Stepan, “Rituals of Respect: Sufis and Secularists in Senegal in Comparative Perspective,” *Comparative Politics* 44, no. 4 (July 2012): 379–401.

2 | Politics, Religious Engagement, and Extremism in Kenya

David Throup

Overview

Ethnicity has long been acknowledged as a key determinant of political identification in Kenya, where personal ties and ethnic solidarity, rather than class or ideology, have been the primary bases for mobilization by politicians and party leaders. Over the past 30 years, however, religion and religious identity have become increasingly important factors in politics.

Membership in Kenya's various religious groups has changed dramatically in recent decades, and consequently estimates of adherents are uncertain and widely disputed. According to the country's 2009 national census, 81 percent of Kenyans identified as Christians and 11 percent as Muslim.¹ Within these broad estimates, there is significant and long-standing diversity, however, and new influences in both Christian and Muslim communities are creating even greater fragmentation. Kenya's Christian population has become increasingly fragmented with the rise of Pentecostalism and a rapid proliferation of Prosperity Gospel preachers in recent decades. The country's Muslim population—among whom there is a widespread sense of grievance and a perception of political and economic marginalization—is likewise fragmented, transformed by Salafist teachings and the infusion of vast sums of money from Saudi Arabia and Iran, a massive inflow of people fleeing Somalia, and increasing numbers of conversions to Islam in traditionally Christian parts of Kenya.

The advent of competitive multiparty politics has deepened fragmentation within and between religious communities, as politicians and religious activists alike have sought to bolster their support by taking advantage of these new divides and changes in the country's religious matrix. The assertive and sometimes divisive role that a number of Christian mission churches played in recent political debates has damaged their standing as institutions above the political and ethnic fray. The institutions that traditionally served to represent Muslim interests to the state have been increasingly seen as co-opted by political

1. This latter figure may be something of an underestimate today. The claim by the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) that at least 20 percent of the population are Muslims may be closer to the mark, although the contention by some Islamic leaders that 30 percent of Kenyans are Muslims is exaggerated.

leadership. Reformist and revivalist influences within both religions are connecting with followers in a way that political and traditional leaders have not, and particularly among long-aggrieved Muslim communities on the coast. This trend, along with heavy-handed government security tactics, may increase the appeal of extremist ideologies.

The Christian Churches and Kenya's Long Road to Democracy

BRIEF OUTLINE OF KENYA'S CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Kenya's Christian community can be divided into four groups: historic mission churches, first wave evangelical and Pentecostal churches that developed from Western missions, African Instituted Churches (some of which are Pentecostal), and the second wave Prosperity Gospel preachers that have become increasingly prominent in the last 30 years.

Roman Catholics likely make up the largest single denomination, perhaps 25 percent of the country's population. The former Protestant mission churches—Anglican, Presbyterian, and Methodist—taken together are probably as large or slightly more numerous, with the Anglicans the largest of the three, comprising 15 to 20 percent of the total Kenyan population. The Roman Catholic and Anglican churches are widely established throughout the country, although the Catholic Church has until recently retained considerable hierarchical discipline and cohesion within its ranks, while the Anglican Church, in contrast, has been a more confederal organization, comprising semiautonomous, largely mono-ethnic dioceses. Indeed, ethnic tension frequently resulted in fragmentation of Anglican dioceses as rival ethnic groups contended for control. Presbyterianism is strongest among the Kikuyu, and the Methodist Church is strongest among the neighboring Meru. All three Protestant denominations are strongly evangelical and theologically conservative.

Close to half of Kenyans are, in one form or another, charismatic or Pentecostal Christians. Many are linked with the traditional mission-based churches: charismatics within the Anglican and Catholic communities constitute close to half of the combined total adherents of these two denominations² and some 20 percent of the total Kenyan population. The mainstream Anglican, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches are strongly evangelical in theology, drawing on the heritage of the Church Missionary Society and the Church of Scotland Mission. The specifically identified Evangelical churches were historically associated with European or U.S.-led missions. The Africa Inland Mission, established in Kenya in 1895 by American Peter Cameron Scott, has a strong following among the Kalenjin ethnic group: Kenya's second president Daniel arap Moi, a Kalenjin, is among its most prominent members. The Gospel Missionary Society, also-American-led, was established in 1902, eventually merging with the Scottish-sponsored Presbytery of Kenya in the 1940s. Finnish missionaries established the Full Gospel Churches of Kenya in 1949 with a strong following

2. Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *Spirit and Power: A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, October 2006), 83–84, <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2006/10/pentecostals-08.pdf>.

among the Luo ethnic group. American missionaries launched the Pentecostal Evangelical Fellowship of Africa in 1944.

African Instituted Churches (AIC), led by Africans rather than foreign missionaries, emerged in the early 1900s, and many are Pentecostal. The Dini Ya Roho or Holy Spirit movement began in 1912 among young Luo members of the Anglican Church, and grew into an independent movement. The African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa (AIPCA) was founded in the early 1930s, and along with the Kikuyu Independent Church, challenged the restrictions of European-led churches and defended Kikuyu cultural practices. The African Israel Church Nineveh, one of Kenya's largest AIC churches, was founded in 1942, drawing membership primarily from among the Luo and Luhya ethnic groups. The East African Revival, a major evangelical renewal movement that originated in Rwanda in the 1930s, was a major influence in Kenya's AIC and mission churches. Today, AIC churches retain sizeable congregations—with perhaps 10 percent of the Kenyan population. They are losing ground, however, to a new wave of charismatic and Pentecostal movements.

Since independence, Kenya has seen a surge of Pentecostal and revivalist movements, launched by both indigenous and foreign evangelists. The Kenya Assemblies of God, launched in 1967 by American Pentecostal Dale Brown, was the fastest growing denomination in Nairobi by 2000, gaining adherents at the rate of 38 percent per year. The Deliverance Church of Kenya, established in 1970 by Kenyan Joe Kayo, has long played a crucial role in the Evangelical Fellowship of Kenya, an organization of Pentecostal and charismatic churches that was established in 1976. The number of Pentecostal churches in Nairobi doubled between 1972 and 1986, and by 2002 there were an estimated 5,000 such churches in the East Africa region with more than half of them active in Kenya. Over the last three decades, televangelism, high-profile Western preachers, and prosperity theology, with its promises of wealth and well-being, have won many further recruits, especially among women.³ Today, some 20 percent of worshippers in Kenya are members of new Pentecostal and prosperity churches.

CHRISTIAN CHURCHES AND THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY

Religious organizations and leaders have long exerted political influence in Kenya both publicly and behind the scenes. In the preindependence era, AIC churches like the AIPCA played a role in fomenting nationalist sentiment and mobilizing followers for the anti-colonial struggle. The mission-based churches, not surprisingly, were largely allied with the colonial regime. In fact, prominent Anglican and Presbyterian missionaries “represented” African interests on the country's Legislative and Executive Councils—essentially helping govern through the colony's parliament and cabinet.

As Kenyans gradually replaced Europeans in the upper ranks of the mission hierarchies following independence, an increasing number of them began to speak out on

3. Women are estimated to make up two-thirds of those attracted to the new Prosperity Gospel.

political affairs. With the death of founding president Jomo Kenyatta and the accession of Daniel arap Moi to office in 1978, many senior mission church leaders became strong and vocal advocates for democracy, human rights, and rule of law. Prominent leaders from across the ethnic, regional, and denominational spectrum spoke out against Moi's heavy-handed authoritarianism, this at a time when protest and dissent among lay citizens were heavily proscribed.

Among Catholics, Ndingi Mwana-a-Nzeki, bishop of Nakuru in the 1980s and early 1990s, spoke out frequently in favor of political reform and provided refuge for many of the 750,000 displaced by the ethnic violence during the 1992 national elections. As a rule, the Catholic Church spoke with one voice, most often through its senior-most leadership or through the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops, an activist body that in the 1990s was heavily influenced by Latin American liberation theology.⁴

Protestant leaders were even more strident in their calls for political reform, although leaders spoke out as individuals rather than as representatives of a united church. Among the most prominent voices were Anglican bishops Henry Okullu in then Nyanza Province and Alexander Muge in then Rift Valley Province, and Presbyterian Timothy Njoya, who occupied the Presbyterian Church's most prestigious pulpit, St. Andrew's, in Nairobi. Although the Moi regime remained strongly supported in the Kalenjin areas of the Rift Valley, in parts of the Coast region and in Ukambani, the majority of the main ethnic groups—Kikuyu, Abaluhya, Luo, and Meru—favored multiparty politics. Consequently, the leaders of the main Christian denominations, which were strongest in these opposition areas, won considerable respect for standing up to the autocratic elements within the then dominant Kenya African National Union (KANU).

Beyond outspoken individuals, the former mission churches worked with each other and in collaboration with political activists, the Law Society of Kenya, other civil society organizations, and the international community to push the Kenyan government reluctantly to introduce multiparty elections in 1991. Both the Protestant National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) and the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (CJPC) worked closely with secular organizations to observe the 1992, 1997, and 2002 elections.

By contrast with the Catholic and Anglican leadership, Pentecostals during the 1980s and 1990s were closely aligned with KANU and President Moi, supporting the regime against the protests of civil society and mainstream churches. The Evangelical Fellowship of Kenya, which has a strong following among churches in the Kalenjin area, was one of the bulwarks of the Moi regime throughout the period. When, in 1985, the Anglican Church's Bishop David Gitari opposed queue voting (instead of a secret ballot) in single-party KANU primaries, the Full Gospel Church, the United Pentecostal Church, Moi's own African Inland Church, and the AIPCA left the Protestant NCCCK en masse to join the Evangelical Fellowship. Bishop Arthur Kitonga of the Redeemed Gospel Church of Kenya was one of

4. In fact, many of the conference's official pronouncements in the 1990s were drafted by Father Rodrigo Mejia, a Colombian Jesuit and staunch proponent of social justice who was based in Nairobi at the time.

President Moi's strongest supporters during the transition to multiparty politics in the early 1990s, a role that Archbishop Samson Gaitho, a Pentecostal, was to play later in the decade as Moi courted the AIPCA.

THE CHURCHES AND KENYA'S FRACTIOUS DEMOCRACY

The 2002 national elections were considered by many a watershed in Kenya's democratic development, bringing an end to KANU's 40-year hegemony. These elections saw Mwai Kibaki defeat KANU candidate Uhuru Kenyatta through the National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC), a last-minute partnership between Kibaki's National Alliance for Kenya and Raila Odinga's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), both themselves coalitions of multiple smaller parties. The introduction of genuinely competitive elections also marked the start of what has been a difficult time for Kenya's major churches, especially the Catholic Church. With KANU defeated, the unity of the former opposition parties began to fragment, with ethnic calculations once again a key factor in driving political alliances. Kenya's traditionally powerful Christian institutions, largely united in the fight for democracy, have become far more divided in the democratic era. In the aftermath of a series of bruising national political controversies, they have found their collective political clout and social authority eroded.

In the run-up to the 2002 elections, there was strong support from the main churches for Kibaki. Kenyatta was widely perceived at the time as a proxy for Moi, and Kibaki was seen to embody the aspirations of the opposition and civil society for democracy, an end to corruption, and change. The Catholic Church had particularly strong affinity for Kibaki, who was among their most prominent members. Further, Kibaki's home district of Nyeri was home to a large Catholic population,⁵ and with Kikuyu areas as a relative stronghold, the Catholic clergy were a powerful activist force in local Kikuyu politics.⁶ Evangelical and Pentecostal leaders, many of whom had supported the Moi government, remained largely neutral in 2002, perhaps sensing that the broad public was not with them. The AIPCA, along with the Africa Inland Church, was one of the few churches to back Kenyatta's candidacy.

Despite NARC's strong electoral victory, the coalition began to disintegrate almost immediately, foundering on the issue of constitutional reform and a 2005 constitutional referendum. Odinga, together with his allies in government and secular civil society, called for constitutional changes that would rapidly dismember the country's "imperial" presidency, create a post of prime minister to oversee government business, and devolve significant powers to lower levels of government. These proposals had been agreed upon in the NARC's 2002 coalition manifesto, along with a commitment to begin the process within 100 days. Kibaki—who was widely perceived as reneging on his pre-election promises to

5. Some 41 percent of inhabitants were Catholic, according to church figures.

6. See Hervé Maupéu, "Le rôle des institutions religieuses," *Les Cahiers d'Afrique de l'Est*, no. 37 (2008): 321–327.

Odinga—rejected the idea of creating a prime minister post, and sought to preserve the power of the presidency by devolving only a limited set of functions to local governments.

At the 2003 National Constitutional Convention (known as the Bomas process), the president submitted a far more modest set of proposals than the NARC had envisaged. In the run-up to the November 2005 referendum on Kibaki's proposal, government ministers in a divided cabinet campaigned on different sides—"bananas" endorsing the Kibaki draft, and "oranges" rejecting it. In the event, the oranges prevailed: 3.5 million votes to 2.5 million. Following the vote, Odinga and his allies were dismissed from government, promptly launching the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) and allying themselves with KANU. Kibaki reconstituted the government with only his closest political allies, heading a much more narrowly based ethnic regime for the two years leading up to the contested December 2007 elections.

Opinion among church leaders, who participated in the National Constitutional Convention, divided largely on ethnic lines. A number denounced the inclusion of the Kadhi courts (Islamic courts to which Muslims can bring civil family and land disputes), and their opposition had already driven Muslim participants out of an interfaith dialogue on constitutional reform. Among Roman Catholics, Archbishop Zacchaeus Okoth of Kisumu and Bishop Cornelius Kipng'eno arap Korir, chair of the Episcopal Conference, opposed the 2005 constitution, largely because of the Kadhi court issue, but also (at least as many Kenyans perceived it) because of their respective ethnic identities as a Luo and a Kalenjin. Archbishop John Njue, a Kikuyu then serving in Kibaki's home area of Nyeri, supported the draft devised by the Kibaki government.

THE 2007 ELECTION CRISIS AND RIFTS WITHIN THE CHURCHES

The December 2007 elections were fiercely contested as Kenyans divided along political and ethnic lines. Rising tensions and violent incidents in the run-up to the vote foreshadowed a massive eruption of violent protests when President Kibaki was declared to have narrowly defeated Odinga.⁷ An estimated 1,500 people were killed nationwide, and 750,000 were forced to flee their homes before the violence subsided in February. In April 2008, a government of national unity was established with Kibaki as president and Odinga as prime minister.

The 2007 election and the ensuing violence inflicted a serious blow to the establishment churches as their leaders once again divided largely along ethnic lines. John Njue, newly

7. Supporters of Odinga and the ODM were doubly suspicious of Kibaki's victory, given the ODM's strong showing in parliament, where it took 90 seats compared to 43 by Kibaki's newly constituted Party of National Unity (PNU). It should be noted, however, that President Kibaki was supported by a coalition of eight other parties, which nominated him for the presidency, as well as his own PNU, while Odinga was backed by only two minor parties in addition to the ODM. The combined pro-Kibaki parties, in fact, polled over 750,000 more votes in the parliamentary elections than the three pro-Odinga parties, suggesting that the narrow margin of victory for Kibaki in the presidential contest may, in fact, be accurate, and that the ODM's victory in the parliamentary contest stemmed from the fact that the eight pro-government parties split the pro-government vote, thus permitting the ODM to win many seats on a minority vote in Kenya's plurality political system where candidates are required only to win more votes than their main rival.

appointed by the Vatican as archbishop of Nairobi and a cardinal, who had been widely respected in the 1990s as head of the CJPC, was condemned for being too close to President Kibaki and Kikuyu chauvinist sentiments. In the months prior to the election, he took a harsh stance against decentralization, denouncing the proposed plan for *majimbo*—a term that in the Moi era was used to mobilize anti-Kikuyu pogroms. Catholic leaders from non-Kikuyu regions quickly distanced themselves from the cardinal's pronouncements, with Kisumu's Archbishop Zacchaeus Okoth calling on the faithful to decide for themselves how they wished to be governed. The row deepened when the Catholic Conference of Bishops issued a statement criticizing the reelection of President Kibaki, only to have it withdrawn by Cardinal Njue and his supporters, who issued a different one, congratulating the president and urging Kenyans to accept the result. Cardinal Francis Arinze, from Nigeria and the most senior African at the Vatican, flew to Kenya to seek a reconciliation between the cardinal and archbishop.

Although most mainline mission churches strongly supported Kibaki, most evangelical and Pentecostal churches favored Odinga and the ODM.⁸ Bishop Margaret Wanjiru Kariuki, for example, the founder and presiding evangelist of Jesus Is Alive Ministries, although a Kikuyu, joined ODM and won a seat in parliament, emerging as a stalwart supporter of Odinga. Pentecostal support stemmed in part from the fact that the ODM was perceived as the anti-establishment party, appealing, insofar as it fought an ideological campaign, to the poorer sections of the community, especially in the slums of Nairobi. The Luo and Kalenjin communities and the Mijikenda and Bajuni in Coast, moreover, thought of themselves as economically marginalized, the forgotten ethnic groups that were in stark contrast to the vibrant Kikuyu-dominated economies of Nairobi and Central Province, which had done so well under Kibaki. Thus, Kibaki, the personification of the Kenyan establishment, was supported by the established churches, while the outsider Odinga attracted the clerical outsiders and newcomers—the evangelicals and the Pentecostals, as well as most Muslims. Odinga's populist message and personal flamboyance perhaps resonated with precisely the same groups as were attracted by these churches and their pastors.

During the run-up to the election, both Protestant and Catholic leaders had called for a peaceful campaign and vote. They castigated vote buying and intimidation. Catholic leaders condemned the postelection violence, and many parishes in the worst-hit areas provided shelter to those displaced by the clashes. Further, the Catholic bishops supported the interparty dialogue, mediated by Kofi Annan, former UN secretary-general, that eventually led to the unity government. But in the aftermath of the elections, the Catholic Church had lost some of its credibility as an institution standing above the political fray. It no longer rose above ethnicity but instead appeared, like so many other Kenyan institutions, to be

8. Support for ODM was not universal among Pentecostals, and ethnic affiliation may in some cases have played a part. Mutava Musyimi, former pastor of Nairobi Baptist Church and later general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Kenya, contested and won a PNU seat in parliament. He won despite being a vocal critic of Moi's centralized government and a prominent advocate of political and constitutional reform. Bishop Stanley Michuki, now the chairman of the Kenya National Congress of Pentecostal Churches, favored Kibaki; family ties (his brother was Kibaki's minister of state for security) may have played a part.

riven by ethnic divisions and, consequently, political loyalties. In its self-assessment after the election, Catholic leaders considered how best to ensure that the church might be less influenced by ethnic factors. Ideas included redrawing diocesan boundaries to include several ethnic groups and ensuring that bishops were not appointed to dioceses dominated by their own ethnic group.

Nonetheless, ethnic divides persist. Catholic parishes within Nairobi, where Luo form the majority of the congregation, have been especially hostile toward Cardinal Njue. Throughout Kibaki's second term, the cardinal, for his part, did little to conceal his disdain for Prime Minister Odinga, and the conflict between the Njue and Archbishop Okoth continues. In 2014, Okoth called upon current President Kenyatta and Deputy President William Ruto, both then indicted by the International Criminal Court for their alleged role in the 2007–2008 electoral violence, to attend hearings at The Hague, and rejected suggestions that Kenya should withdraw from the court. Only after a heated internal debate did the Conference of Catholic Bishops issue a more muted statement urging “all Kenyans to be calm, united and patient allowing the court process to run its course.”⁹

Protestant leaders fared somewhat better after the 2007 elections, largely because they were already fragmented to some extent along ethnic lines, and Kenyans had fewer expectations for nonpartisanship. The Kenyan public generally accepted that the African Inland Church was a Kalenjin-dominated organization and was therefore likely to be pro-ODM, while the Presbyterians, frequently portrayed by Kenyans as “the Kikuyu at prayer,” were expected to support Kibaki's PNU. Most Anglican leaders, like their Catholic counterparts, had overwhelmingly favored President Kibaki and the PNU. Because ODM leader Odinga was himself an Anglican, they were able to dismiss accusations of institutional partisanship. Anglican bishops and dioceses, meanwhile, were well known to reflect the sentiments of the controlling ethnic group among their congregations, and Kenyans did not expect their leaders to speak out unequivocally to the politicians and perpetrators of violence. To their credit, Anglican clergymen, once the violence died down, proved more open than their Catholic counterparts in criticizing themselves and their church for not taking a more resolute line during the crisis. The Protestant NCKK also questioned its role, embarking on a “journey of repentance” under its new secretary-general, Canon Peter Karanja of the Anglican Church.

THE CHURCHES AND THE 2010 CONSTITUTION

If the major churches emerged bruised from the 2007 election, their clergy demoralized, and their congregants perhaps less inclined than previously to follow the bishops and other church leaders, they were soon to become embroiled in an even more damaging dispute when the churches more or less stood united against the 2010 constitution. This was a self-inflicted wound, which seriously damaged their legitimacy as influencers of political

9. “Our Nation, Our Concerns,” Statement by the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops, November 7, 2013, available on Kurunziafrika website at <https://kurunziafrika.wordpress.com/2013/11/10/document-catholic-bishops-of-kenya-our-beloved-nation-our-concerns/>.

debate virtually everywhere except the Kalenjin areas of the Rift Valley. The new constitution was undoubtedly a secular document, designed to bestow maximum freedoms on all Kenyans, while instituting a complex system of checks and balances on the central government. Along the lines of what Odinga's LDP had envisioned in 2002, the proposed reforms aimed, among other things, to dismantle the "imperial presidency" and usher in the devolution of major responsibilities to 47 newly formed counties.¹⁰

The sections of the new constitution that aroused the ire of church leaders—clauses allegedly permitting abortion and the organization of Kadhi courts—essentially replicated provisions that existed, unchallenged, under the old constitution.¹¹ Evangelical and Pentecostal leaders, as well as some Catholic and mainstream Protestant leaders, had denounced the provisions during the 2003 Bomas process, and had opposed inclusion of the courts when they appeared in President Kibaki's unpopular 2005 draft proposal, but vociferous opposition in the mainstream churches did not really surface until the drafting of the 2010 constitution, when a fully revamped constitution stood a chance of being passed.

The vast majority of Kenyans were eager to dismantle the overly centralized state structure. Constituency development funds, introduced by President Kibaki to provide funding directly to local communities, had proved extremely popular, and the further devolution of power to 47 counties was widely supported. Further, the provisions on abortion and Kadhi courts were supported by most political leaders, including President Kibaki, Prime Minister Odinga, and (somewhat less enthusiastically) by Uhuru Kenyatta. By intransigently opposing the new constitution, therefore, the churches set themselves in opposition to the vast majority of Kenya's political elite and citizenry. Only discredited former president Moi, other Kalenjin leaders, and the maverick Kikuyu radical Koigi wa Wamwere lined up with the churches to oppose its passage. Muslim leaders supported the new proposals, which protected their long-standing legal rights over family and inheritance affairs. Backed by both major parties, most prominent politicians, secular civil society, and Kenya's Muslims, the new constitution was approved by two-thirds of voters. The church leaders' advice was spurned by the majority of Kenyans, except in the Kalenjin redoubt of former president Moi and William Ruto.

Today, the Catholic Church remains divided, and Cardinal Njue continues to be unpopular in Luo and other pro-opposition areas, where he is viewed as a Kikuyu chauvinist, far

10. The counties had some basis in the administrative structures of the late colonial era.

11. The controversial Section 26(4) merely reaffirmed the existing penal code by stating, "Abortion is not permitted unless, in the opinion of a trained health professional, there is need for emergency treatment, or the life or health of the mother is in danger, or if permitted by any other written law." Church leaders contended that the weak drafting of the clause might allow for the clause to be used to enact laws or justify procurement of on-demand abortion. They also argued that Section 24(4) exempted Muslims from broad sections of the Bill of Rights, governing personal status, marriage, divorce, and inheritance, and that Section 170 provided for the establishment of Kadhi courts, which in Section 170(2)a discriminated against all other Kenyans by limiting the courts only to Muslims. The provision, they argued, also undermined the clarity of the separation of religion and the state doctrine, and the equality of religions. A three-judge bench of the High Court in 2004 had, in fact, reached a similar conclusion but had been overruled in the Supreme Court. Muslim leaders vowed to retaliate by seeking a judicial declaration against the teaching of Christianity as part of the public school curriculum (which, it should be noted, also includes Islam).

too close politically to President Kenyatta and the government. The other major former mission churches have also failed to recover the moral authority that they lost during the electoral crisis and constitutional debate. At present, it appears that some church leaders across denominations may be tempted to use their opposition to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights to repair their image, and to reestablish their moral authority and connection with Kenya's citizens.¹²

WHAT ROLE FOR PENTECOSTAL AND PROSPERITY GOSPEL CHURCHES?

The rapid rise of new Pentecostal and Prosperity Gospel churches (distinct from historic Pentecostal and AIC churches) raises questions on what role their influential leaders, with their ever-growing congregations, will play in political affairs, particularly as mainstream churches have yet to recover from their decline in influence in recent political crises. While Pentecostals joined the mainstream churches in opposing the 2010 constitution, they seem to have experienced less fall-out, and the Prosperity Gospel churches, in particular, continue to attract new adherents.

Leaders of the new prosperity churches have remained politically disengaged and direct their message instead to the “worldly” agenda of their followers and their immediate concerns for jobs, wealth, and health. There are some strains within the broad community: Bishop Margaret Wanjiru and Prophet David Owuor were engaged in a highly publicized dispute over the credibility of their miracles, ostentatious lifestyles, qualifications, and dedication to God. Bishop Stanley Michuki, the founder of the National Congress of Pentecostal Churches, a coalition of Prosperity Gospel preachers, has warned its more extravagant members not to bring the community into disrepute. Michuki's difficulties in creating an organization to control these autonomous churches points to their diffuse nature. Mission churches and these newer churches have clashed on multiple occasions. Cardinal Njue banned the activities of the Charismatic Renewal Movement in the archdiocese of Nairobi in 2009, accusing the rapidly growing global movement of “activities that are contrary to the doctrine of the church.”¹³ Bishop Michuki distanced the Pentecostal churches from the NCKK, particularly over the latter's contention that President Kenyatta and Deputy President Ruto should appear at The Hague. Michuki claimed that group and its leader Canon Karanja “represented foreign churches which represent the interests of foreign countries who would like the president to be humiliated.”¹⁴

12. The vast majority of Kenyans—90 percent, according to a 2013 survey—believe that homosexuality should not be accepted by society. See Pew Research Center, “The Global Divide on Homosexuality,” June 4, 2013, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/06/04/the-global-divide-on-homosexuality/>.

13. See Kurunza Afrika, “Kenya: Will Pope Francis Remove ‘Divisive’ John Cardinal Njue?,” November 30, 2013, <https://kurunziafrika.wordpress.com/2013/11/30/kenya-will-pope-francis-remove-divisive-john-cardinal-njue>. The article, obviously written by someone hostile to Cardinal Njue within the Roman Catholic Church concludes, “Njue has remained a divisive figure: unashamedly pro-establishment, a social justice turncoat, inclined to tribal loyalties and ultimately unable to cultivate a national constituency in ethnically diverse Kenya like the country's beloved first ‘prince of the church,’ the legendary Maurice Michael, Cardinal Otunga.” Clearly, the divisions within the Catholic Church have not been resolved.

14. “Pentecostal Church faults NCKK stand on ICC cases,” *The People* (Kenya), December 3, 2013.

Many of the new charismatic churches are themselves far less interested in participating in intra-Christian, much less interfaith, organizations or dialogues. At a time when Muslim communities are increasingly stigmatized, this does not bode well for the possibility that these increasingly influential churches will play a role in bridging national divides or building social cohesion.

Certainly, political leaders see their potential as sources of mobilization and support. President Kenyatta, who is Catholic, and Deputy President Ruto, who belongs to the African Inland Church, seem as eager as former president Moi was to court these churches and especially the new Prosperity Gospel preachers. Financial and criminal scandals, however, continue to damage the reputation of some of the more colorful preachers. Competition among them is fierce, with one-third of their congregants moving on to a different preacher every six months. Given their diffuse nature, it seems improbable that the Prosperity Gospel churches will be able to institutionalize either their religious or political influence in the foreseeable future.

Political Grievance and Diversity among Kenya's Muslim Communities

Kenya's growing Muslim community is under the political spotlight as never before. Government attempts to address the security threat posed by the terrorist group Al-Shabaab have tended to target adherents of Islam as a monolithic collective, ignoring their doctrinal and ethnic diversity and the multiple sources of political grievance. The government's ham-handed response has compounded a long-standing perception among Muslims that they are treated as second-class citizens. Paradoxically, the government's failure to discriminate between the large Muslim mainstream and the small number of extremists is the most likely impetus for greater support for extremism across the country's diverse Muslim communities.

Muslims dominate the former Northeastern Province, where the Kenyan-Somali community is concentrated, and the coast, which is also home to considerable numbers of Christians, many of who have come from up-country to acquire land and pursue economic opportunities. Northern Kenya, stretching from the Ethiopian border to Isiolo County in the middle of the country, is also largely Muslim, and there are significant Muslim minorities in Nairobi and other major towns. Muslims are drawn from different ethnic groups and include Arabs and Asians, as well as indigenous Africans, including Somalis, Bajunis, Swahili, Mijikenda, and Galla. This diversity works against the community acting in unison to advance its interests.

The number of Muslims in Kenya is disputed but is probably much higher than the 11 percent officially stated in the 2009 census. They are, however, a minority, and their relations with both the colonial and postcolonial state and with Christians reflect this status. Muslim regions are less developed than predominantly Christian ones, and access

to modern education is less widespread. Investment in agriculture has been hindered by the semiarid climate in which many Kenyan Muslims live and by the fact that individual land title in rural areas is rare. Although individual Muslims have held significant positions in government, none has been a front-rank politician. Not a single Muslim, for example, served as a cabinet minister during Kenya's first three decades of independence, although this situation has improved since the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1991.

Most Kenyan Muslims, including those of African, Arab, and South Asian origin, are Sunni, with a strong Sufi influence. Traditionally, Islam in Kenya has been syncretic, incorporating elements of African traditional beliefs. A few isolated intellectuals during the colonial era and in the immediate postindependence period sought to encourage more rigorous interpretations of the Qur'an but with little popular success. Most of the key imams until recent years were of Arab origin, and Arab and Asian elites dominated the leading mosques and the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) until the 1990s. Islam has not provided a successful platform to pursue political objectives. SUPKEM and similar organizations have been useful institutions through which Muslim elites can engage with the state, and they also provide a means for the state to monitor the behavior of imams and Muslim nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). However, they have not reached out beyond the elite to the Muslim masses to address social and economic grievances and sense of marginalization.

By contrast, Al-Shabaab, the Somali-based jihadi movement, is more explicit in its religious appeals. It has sought to portray itself as a defender of oppressed Muslims by manipulating the social and economic grievances and widespread sense of neglect at the hands of the Kenyan state prevalent in Muslim regions. Al-Shabaab's violent attacks have provoked a heavy-handed response by the government, with considerable brutality by the security forces. This has only strengthened support for the terrorist movement, increasing the sense of a community under siege. The government interprets any criticism of the security forces as disloyal, despite evidence of police brutality and illegal assassinations.

ETHNIC CLEAVAGES WITHIN ISLAM

The most significant divide within Kenya's Muslim community is along ethnic lines. Understanding the divisions between Arab, South Asian, and African Muslims helps explain why Islam has not been an effective tool for articulating and pursuing political objectives. The colonial period opened up these divides; the colonial authorities extended the franchise to Asians and Arabs in the early 1930s, while excluding all Africans, including Mijikenda and Bajuni on the coast, and the Somali and Galla.¹⁵ These ethnic fault lines resulted in contrasting political stances at independence. Indigenous African Muslims supported the Kenyan independence movement; Arabs favored independence for the coast or union with Zanzibar; and Somalis voted overwhelmingly in a referendum for union with the Somali

15. The first African elections did not take place until March 1957, when the first eight Africans were elected.

Republic. However, Asian and Arab leaders, unlike some of the Somalis, quickly accommodated themselves to independence in 1963. They went on to dominate national Muslim organizations including SUPKEM, founded in 1973, which brought together most Muslim NGOs and religious leaders, ostensibly providing a structure to negotiate with the Kenya government.

From the beginning, KANU politicians from Muslim regions occupied key positions in SUPKEM. Assistant Minister Ahmad Khalif served as its secretary-general from 1982 to 1994. Other prominent SUPKEM members with close ties to the ruling party included Assistant Ministers Mohamed Jehazi and Shaikh Salim Balala in the 1970s, and Sharif Nassir, the long-serving KANU Mombasa chairman and member of parliament for Mombasa-Mvita in the 1980s and 1990s. These ties facilitated contact with government officials but also meant that SUPKEM from its inception was “captured” by the then single-party, making it difficult to establish a separate identity from the regime. The creation of the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK) in 1992 was in part driven by SUPKEM’s failure to provide a credible national political platform for Muslim concerns, although the government refused to grant it recognition on the grounds that it was sectarian.

Indigenous African leaders, especially at the Coast, resented Arab control of Muslim politics in Mombasa. Their main spokesman in the 1990s until his death in 2004 was Emmanuel Maitha. The long-running quarrel between Sharif Nassir and Maitha demonstrates the complexity of the political, religious, and ethnic divisions at the coast. Nassir and Maitha competed through different factions within KANU before continuing their rivalry in the multiparty system after Maitha defected to the Democratic Party in 1997. This meant that they would not work together to resolve the social and economic grievances of the Muslim communities in Mombasa and the wider Coast region that were fueling Islamic radicalism. This was despite that fact that they were united in their opposition to the IPK and concerned about the growth of extremism. Maitha, in fact, saw the IPK and the growing Salafist influence as Arab-instigated. In 1993, he helped form the United Muslims of Africa to oppose the IPK and its leader, Sheikh Balala, who he accused of trying to turn Mombasa into a center of Islamic fundamentalism.¹⁶ Suspicion of Arab influence by indigenous African groups such as the Mijikenda has so far prevented Salafism and its jihadi extremist wing from making major inroads into the coast’s African communities, although this is beginning to change because of disquiet over the government’s harsh counterterrorist strategy.

Although the dynamics were different, ethnic cleavages among Muslims also defined relationships inland. In the early 1990s, the Arab and Asian elite tried to regain control of the Jamia Mosque in Nairobi from the imam, Ali Shee, who was preaching a more Salafist creed, backed by the infusion of new Somali and African worshippers.¹⁷ Shee also clashed

16. Arye Oded, *Islam and Politics in Kenya* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 65–67.

17. *Ibid.*, 49–54.

with the government-appointed Chief Kadhi (the head of the Kadhi Courts),¹⁸ whom he castigated as a stooge of the regime. Shee's critics eventually succeeded in ousting him following a protracted campaign, marred by violent protests by rival sets of supporters, which lasted until 1996.

The Jamia Mosque saga exposed the shortcomings of SUPKEM, which failed to arbitrate among the competing parties and was seen as partial to the Asian and Arab establishment at the expense of the indigenous African and Somali communities. Partly as a result of this dispute, two new Muslim institutions were formed in the mid-1990s, bringing together the country's leading ulama and imams: the National Muslim Leaders Forum (NAMLEF) and the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya (CIPK). These two organizations have provided better political direction to Muslim communities over the last two decades and are less closely associated with the Kenyan state than SUPKEM. The Muslim faithful, however, still remain divided by ethnicity as much as doctrine.¹⁹

Somalis have gradually assumed more importance within the Muslim community of Kenya. If Kenya's Muslims feel themselves to be a marginalized minority within the country, then Somalis feel themselves to be a marginalized minority within the Muslim population. They are required to carry a second special identity card. Kenya's indigenous Somalis suffered state repression during the Shifta war of 1963–1969, when guerrillas infiltrating from Somalia sought to mobilize the community to secede. Jomo Kenyatta's government enforced 23-hour curfews, established protected villages, and conducted an aggressive bombing campaign to suppress the revolt. In the 1960s and early 1970s, Somalis formed by far the highest proportion of political detainees. The collapse of the Somali state in 1991 exacerbated the problem of integration with some two million people fleeing Somalia for Kenya as both legal refugees and illegal immigrants. The Kenya government's tendency to associate the problem of terrorism with the Somali community specifically has severely damaged relations not only with them but with the broader Muslim community and has ultimately hampered efforts to deal with Kenya's security problems.

MUSLIM RELATIONS WITH THE STATE: AREAS OF CONTENTION

Social, Economic, and Political Grievances at the Coast

Kenya's coastal communities—particularly Muslim communities—harbor social and economic grievances that have erupted in protests against the government and triggered security responses that have disproportionately targeted Muslims. Jobs have gone to up-country migrants—Kikuyu, Luo, and Kamba—who are frequently better educated than

18. The Chief Kadhi is the chief judge of the country's Kadhi court system. Appointed by the government Judicial Services Commission, the Chief Kadhi is not necessarily an imam or spiritual leader, but "(a) professes the Muslim religion; and (b) possesses such knowledge of the Muslim law applicable to any sects of Muslims as qualifies the person, in the opinion of the Judicial Service Commission, to hold a Kadhi's court." See Chapter 10 of the Constitution of Kenya, available on the Kenya Law Commission website at <http://www.klrc.go.ke/index.php/constitution-of-kenya>.

19. Hassan J. Ndlovu, *Muslims in Kenyan Politics: Political Involvement, Marginalization, and Minority Status* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014), 99–105.

people at the coast. Members of the political elite and their business associates have seized land to build hotels and establish businesses and sisal plantations, dispossessing local residents in Kwale (mainly Muslim) and Kilifi (mainly Christian) counties. The region lags behind central and western Kenya in access to education, health care, and basic infrastructure, and feels politically and economically marginalized.²⁰ The government has actively encouraged Kikuyu and Kamba settlement in Kwale County since the 1950s and in Lamu County since the late 1960s. As a result, 30 percent of the land in the former is now held by up-country settlers, while in Lamu Kikuyu residents dominate the large Mpeketoni division and as of 2009 made up nearly 40 percent of the county's population. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that approximately 80 percent of smallholders in Coast have no title deeds.

These issues lie at the heart of the sense of grievance among communities indigenous to the Coast region and are likely to be exacerbated if the government's plans for a major development corridor linking the Lamu Port, South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Uganda (LAPSSET) come to fruition. At an estimated cost of at least \$30 billion, the LAPSSET corridor is designed to transform the north, through a deep-water port, road and rail networks, natural gas and oil pipelines, and electrical transmission lines. Such schemes will potentially expose this primarily Muslim area to acute social and economic changes. The local fishing industry has already been disrupted by the start of port construction at Lamu. Residents on the mainland of the county are concerned that their land, which is held on communal tenure and is unregistered, will be seized by the government or unscrupulous up-country "big men" who will make fortunes from the development schemes.

Some of these grievances are couched in religious terms but not predominantly so. In Kwale and Kilifi counties, they are articulated by the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), an organization committed to the independence of the Coast. Although its stronghold is in Kwale, among the Digo section of the Mijikenda, who are virtually all Muslim, the MRC has adopted a secular approach in order to win support among other sections of the Mijikenda in Kilifi County, who include numerous Christians. In 2012, the MRC also sought with the connivance of local politicians to stir up the settled Pokomo population in Tana River County against local pastoralists in the run-up to the 2013 elections. In the violence that ensued, 200 died and 13,500 were displaced.

Salafist Islam, Jihadism, and the Politics of the Urban Coast

While the MRC has pursued a secular agenda, Al-Shabaab has explicitly made religious appeals, using tensions in the region to paint a narrative of a Muslim community exploited by Christian overlords. Indeed Al-Shabaab has sought to foment intercommunal and inter-religious strife to mobilize support and advance its violent campaign. In 2014, the group killed more than 60 people over two days in a series of attacks targeting up-country immigrants near Mpeketoni, attacks that were initially dismissed by the government as the work of local political networks.

20. Nairobi on its own generates 50 percent of Kenya's gross national product (GNP).

Al-Shabaab is finding increasingly fertile ground for its narrative in urban areas of the Coast, especially in Mombasa, Malindi, and Lamu, which have witnessed the growth of jihadi elements among young Arabs, Swahili, and Bajuni, and to a lesser extent Mijikenda. This stems from the infusion of Salafist teachings, starting in the 1960s but gathering momentum since the 1980s. This conservative movement was in part a response to the challenges posed by the tourist industry—alcohol, drugs, and immodest female dress—to the community’s traditional values. Competition between Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states on the one hand, and Iran on the other, to promote their influence among Muslims in Kenya from the early 1980s, further increased the appeal of Salafist Islam along the coast. With the advent of multiparty politics, these forces became linked to the IPK and Sheikh Khalid Balala, and were behind rioting in the streets of Mombasa with cries of “Allah Akbar” and “Jihad” in May 1992.²¹ Although public confrontation with the police diminished following Balala’s brief banishment, some of those associated with the protests of 1992–1994, such as Aboud Rogo Mohammed, later played a key role in both the radicalization of Islam and the establishment of ties between Kenyan radicals and al Qaeda.

The Somalis and Al-Shabaab

The Somali population of Kenya is large and diverse, and in total probably numbers nearly three million people. It can be divided into three groups more or less equal in size: Kenya’s indigenous Somali communities; those officially processed as refugees living in the sprawling Dadaab refugee camps near the Kenya-Somalia border or processed through and moved to other parts of Kenya, particularly the Nairobi neighborhood of Eastleigh; and those who have entered the country illegally seeking refuge.

Kenya’s indigenous Somalis, especially its elite, have done well in the last 30 years. President Moi enlisted them in his reconfiguration of the political economy of Kenya, which transferred resources from central Kenya to the Kalenjin of the Rift Valley and other communities marginalized under Jomo Kenyatta’s presidency. Somalis were promoted to senior positions in the army and in the provincial administration, and some of their children hold high-ranking positions in public life to this day. Ordinary Somalis have done less well, and life in northeastern Kenya remains hard. There is little doubt, however, that most Kenyan-Somalis today prefer to be Kenyan rather than join with the failed Somali state.

Kenyan politicians frequently condemn the 450,000 refugees in the Dadaab camps as a source of support for terrorism. Research by the Open Society Foundations, however, suggests that there is little support for Al-Shabaab in the camps, especially among those who were raised there in the 1990s.²² Instead, the camps provide a potential reservoir of educated entrepreneurial skills. The Somali population of Eastleigh numbers perhaps a

21. Arye Oded, “Islamic extremism in Kenya: The Rise and Fall of Sheikh Khalid Balala,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 26, no. 4 (1996): 406–415.

22. Ben Rawlence, Open Society Foundations fellow, discussion at Chatham House, London, May 8, 2014 http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/2014Somali%20Refugees%20in%20Kenya.pdf.

quarter of a million residents and is estimated to contribute \$780 million per year in foreign exchange to the Kenyan economy.²³

That said, Salafism has expanded among Kenya's Somalis over the last quarter of a century. Sufism has lost influence with the spread of education and funding from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. Clearly, some Somalis in Kenya support Al-Shabaab or its Kenyan offshoot Al-Hijra. Even before Kenya's military intervention in Somalia began in 2011, Al-Shabaab operatives were infiltrating the Somali-populated northeastern region and more distant parts of northern Kenya. Kenya's decision to cross the Somalia border into Jubaland in order to create a buffer zone provoked further infiltration as Al-Shabaab stepped up attacks inside Kenya in an attempt to undermine the government's resolve. While most of these operations have been small scale, the attacks on Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Mpeketoni, and the University of Garissa have been much more serious. Al-Hijra has developed its own jihadist strategy and is no longer simply concerned with inflicting damage within Kenya to secure the withdrawal of Kenyan forces from Somalia. It now wants to destabilize the country and create an East African Caliphate. Its agenda is no longer Somalia-driven but has become primarily motivated by Kenya's own domestic divisions.

The Up-Country Converts

The final component of Kenya's Muslim communities are what can be termed the up-country converts, those who have converted to Islam in areas of central and western Kenya and the Rift Valley, which before the 1980s were overwhelmingly Christian. The collapse of Kenya's school system during the era of structural adjustment policies in the mid-1980s had a major impact on conversions to Islam. Many Christian parents in up-country districts began to send their children to Muslim schools, where, unlike in state schools, they would at least learn obedience and the basic ability to read, write, and do arithmetic. Development funds from donors in the Middle East were poured into Muslim education in historically non-Muslim parts of Kenya, as well as at the coast and northeast, where they encouraged the strengthening of Salafist teaching.

Islam in up-country Kenya remains a primarily urban phenomenon, but secondary cities like Eldoret and Machakos have grown nearly 10-fold over the last 40 years. Hundreds, even thousands of mosques have been built, ranging from impressive Saudi-funded constructions in the urban centers to extremely modest huts with tin roofs in the slums. It is these "informal sector" mosques that have had the biggest impact, changing the religious structure of Kenya. Children from the slums, educated in slum mosques and disillusioned by life in Uhuru Kenyatta's Kenya, are as likely to provide the leadership of Al-Hijra as refugee Somalis or disgruntled coast residents. The terrorists that confront Kenya are the

23. Jason Patinkin, "How Kenya's 'war on terror' disrupts a thriving Nairobi district," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 17, 2014. See especially N. Carrier and E. Lochery, "Missing States: Somali Trade Networks and the Eastleigh Transformation," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7, no. 2 (2013); and N. Carrier, *Little Mogadishu: Eastleigh, Nairobi's Global Somali Hub* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2014).

products of the Kenyan state's development failures in its heartland just as much as in the coast periphery and the pastoralist backwaters of north and northeastern Kenya.

The Government's Counterterrorism Approach

Kenya has faced a prolonged threat from terrorism, dating back to the early 1990s when al Qaeda used a cell in the region to plan and carry out attacks, including the bombings of U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998 and an Israeli-owned hotel in Mombasa in 2002. This threat has evolved into the present-day challenge posed by Al-Shabaab and Al-Hijra. The response of the Kenyan authorities to this serious threat has placed the Muslim community under immense strain, deepened resentment toward the authorities, and contributed to radicalization among fringe elements.

One current focus of disquiet has been the clampdown by the Kenyatta government on civil society, particularly on groups advocating for the Muslim community. In 2014, the government banned 15 NGOs based in northern Kenya and the Coast as part of a campaign against organizations that were unregistered or had failed to submit financial returns. It also subsequently blocked financial flows to Somalia. Official suspicion of Muslim NGOs is linked to the history of al Qaeda in the region, which initially set up an NGO as a front organization to raise and channel funds. However, the continued harassment of human rights organizations such as Haki Africa and Muslims for Human Rights, which the government has placed on a list of alleged supporters of terrorism, appears to be a settling of scores. Both these organizations have accused the Anti-Terrorism Police Unit of carrying out extra-judicial killings and "enforced disappearances," including the assassination of Aboud Rogo in 2012. Yet these NGOs are precisely the kinds of groups with which the Kenya government needs to work if it is to improve its standing with the Muslim population.

In its interactions with Muslims, the Kenya government continues to privilege security concerns above all else. It also tends to blame terrorist attacks primarily upon the Somali community, particularly refugees from camps at Dadaab. The problems, however, are far more deeply rooted and systemic. Radical Islam and its jihadi wing are growing in popularity not only among the country's Somalis but also the population at the Coast and even among converts in up-country areas. The government tends to conflate legitimate opposition from its Muslim citizens with terrorism and adopts a hard-line, frequently brutal, response.²⁴

This approach is alienating local residents and driving them into the arms of terror organizations. Officials remain resistant to the notion that the Muslim regions of Kenya feel neglected and dispossessed, pointing out that many other parts of the country are as

24. Human Rights Watch, "Kenya: Botched Response to Deadly Attacks," June 15, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/06/15/kenya-botched-response-deadly-attacks>. See also Human Rights Watch, *Insult to injury: The 2014 Lamu and Tana River Attacks and Kenya's Abusive Response* (New York: Human Rights Watch, June 2015), https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/insult_to_injury.pdf; and Gerry Simpson, "Dispatches: After Garissa Carnage, Kenya's Backlash Begins," Human Rights Watch, April 13, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/13/dispatches-after-garissa-carnage-kenyas-backlash-begins>, which relates the government's measures against Somali refugees.

undeveloped as the coast and northeastern regions. This may be true, but other regions have not developed the same sense of historical alienation, and terrorists are not exploiting local grievances in the way they are doing in some of the predominantly Muslim areas.

THE MUSLIM RESPONSE TO EXTREMISM: MANAGING INTRA- AND INTERFAITH RELATIONS

As the appeal of Salafi Islam has grown over the past 30 years, the Chief Kadhi and SUPKEM have lost influence within the Muslim community. No longer identified with a single party as it was before 2002, SUPKEM still tries to mediate between Muslims and the government, yet it is still widely seen as an organization that has been co-opted by the regime. NAMLEF and the CIPK have done a better job at asserting their independence from the state, but they too are seen as far too moderate by radical Muslim youths, who are attracted by jihadi ideology. The jihadists clearly see leaders of these two groups as their most significant opponents within the Muslim community, the agencies most likely to challenge their appeals to terror and political violence. This has been demonstrated by the assassination of moderate Muslim leaders such as Sheikh Mohammed Idris, the chairman of the CIPK, who used his Friday sermons to preach tolerance.

Christian-Muslim relations remained strained after the conflict over constitutional provisions on Kadhi courts. The murders of clergymen and the bombings of Christian churches not only at the coast and in northern Kenya, but also in Nairobi, have hindered the improvement of relations, despite condemnation of the attacks by the three main Muslim organizations and by many moderate imams. There has been, however, little cooperation between the main faiths on nonreligious issues, such as development schemes. Muslim development NGOs are much poorer and less well established than their Christian counterparts. Both groups of religious leaders, however, are eager to increase cooperation on development issues.

Conclusion

Ethnicity and religion are deeply woven into Kenyan society and political life. In the face of a changing society, rising expectations, and mounting economic disparity, religious leaders and their political counterparts will need to better discern and address the aspirations and concerns of their congregants and citizens.

The Christian churches campaign against the Kadhi courts in the 2010 constitutional referendum divided church leaders of virtually all denominations both from many of their congregants but also from the Muslim communities and the imams. The churches carry less political influence than they did during the dark days of President Moi, and the rise of political competition, which remains infused by ethnic calculation, has created fissures within the religious community. Prosperity Gospel preachers, with their political quietism, are weakening the mainstream churches and the historic African Instituted Churches, and are making it increasingly difficult for the Christian churches to speak out both to the

government and to ordinary Kenyans. A troubling possibility is that church leaders might seek to restore their authority and heal the interfaith wounds created by the constitutional debates of the last decade by taking a hard line against LGBT rights.

More immediately dangerous to both Muslim leaders and secular authorities will be a continued failure to address the grievances of Kenya's marginalized Muslim millions. The Al-Shabaab insurgency and the appeal of extremism will only increase unless the Kenyatta government revises its strategy and works through interlocutors like Muslims for Human Rights and Haki Africa to win the confidence and trust of its Muslim citizens. Bridges can be built if the government begins to work with Muslim moderates and their organizations to improve the condition of lives at the Coast. The government could do more to address old grievances, improve land tenure, and fully incorporate the Coast and other Muslim areas into the country's decade-long economic boom. The proposed LAPSET development corridor offers a real opportunity in this regard, so long as government and community leaders work to ensure that sufficient benefits flow to local communities. Religious leaders and their congregants have a potentially important role in making that happen.

3 | Religion and the State in Uganda: Co-option and Compromise

*Richard Downie*¹

Overview

Religion and politics have intertwined in Uganda in a more overt way, over a longer period of time, than in most other African countries. The arrival of Christian missionaries to the then-independent Kingdom of Buganda in 1877, which was predated by the acceptance of Islam in the court of the Bugandan leader, triggered keen religious rivalries that continue to the present day. At all points, the secular leadership has tried—and often succeeded—in shaping this contestation to its own ends. Today, the relationship between the spiritual and the temporal plays out in different ways depending on the religious group and its relative influence vis-à-vis the state. Protestants, through the Anglican Church (Church of Uganda), are closest to the political establishment. Catholics are Uganda's largest religious group but have failed to convert their numerical strength into political power. Meanwhile, an assertive Pentecostal movement gains in followers, voice, and influence, yet maintains a curiously ambivalent relationship with the political leadership. Muslims are treated with suspicion by the authorities but are slowly gaining confidence and cautiously stepping into the policy arena to challenge their perceived status as second-class citizens.

Religious leaders in Uganda are respected members of the community. In a deeply religious—and conservative—society, their pronouncements carry weight and influence and the secular authorities treat them carefully. At the same time, the government under Yoweri Museveni is assiduous in its efforts to control the country's main institutions and the church is no exception. A combination of patronage and subtle and not-so-subtle threats largely succeed in keeping religious authorities in their place and restrict them to areas of engagement considered nonthreatening, such as service delivery and conflict mediation.

In some instances, religious leaders have refused to restrict their engagement to these rigidly defined areas and have spoken out on controversial issues such as official corruption. In the main, they have done so as individuals, without the backing of their religious institutions. The privileged position of religious leaders in Uganda affords them greater

1. This chapter is based on fieldwork undertaken by the author, together with CSIS Africa Program director Jennifer Cooke and former program coordinator Farha Tahir, in January–February 2013.

latitude to voice criticism of the authorities than other citizens enjoy, such as opposition politicians and civil society activists. Nevertheless, they remain vulnerable to co-option and coercion and it is unclear whether any of them have the appetite and resources to place themselves at the vanguard of social and political change in a country where democratic space is fast closing.

Introduction

A visit to the Watoto Church headquarters in downtown Kampala underlines the importance of religious faith to Ugandans. A Pentecostal mega-church with eight branches dotted around the country, its flagship location holds five services on a Sunday to accommodate its congregation. For those who cannot attend in person, podcasts of its sermons can be downloaded online. This spiritual enthusiasm is replicated at churches and mosques around the country. At St. Francis Chapel, on Makerere University campus, two services, back-to-back on a Sunday, are insufficient to meet demand and worshippers spill out to—and beyond—the improvised gazebo assembled on the grass outside. At the colossal Uganda National Mosque, situated atop one of the seven hills that dominate Kampala’s landscape, up to 30,000 worshippers attend Friday prayers. Religion is by no means the only identity marker held dear by Ugandans but it matters a great deal. As a result, the messages delivered in sermons and prayers at places of worship can have a big impact and reach a large audience. Religious leaders in Uganda exert moral authority and what they say carries considerable weight in public life. Politicians know this and turn to them for support and legitimization. Religious institutions also provide a network to tap into, according to one leading opposition politician: “The churches have been the automatic center of influence for politicians wishing to seek support,” he says, “because they have structures. This is particularly important because of the political chaos in Uganda, which means there have never been political parties with grassroots networks.”²

How have Uganda’s religious groups and leaders chosen to use this considerable influence in public life? And how have Uganda’s secular leaders sought to limit or direct it in useful or mutually beneficial ways? This paper will analyze these questions and examine some of the ways in which religious groups engage with the secular authorities. It will argue that Uganda’s political elite—dominated by President Yoweri Museveni and his National Resistance Movement (NRM)—have blunted the influence of religious institutions in broader public life through a combination of methods including threats, inducements, and manipulation. While a few individual leaders of strength and integrity have withstood these efforts, they tend to operate outside their religious institutions. Denied patronage and resources—and in some cases harassed by the authorities—they struggle to make their voices heard.

2. Interview with opposition political leader, Kampala, February 1, 2013.

History

Religion has been at the heart of Uganda's politics since Islam and Christianity arrived in the independent kingdom of Buganda in the second half of the 19th century. Adherents of the two main faiths competed for access to the Baganda king, the kabaka, and were in turn influenced and manipulated by his court. Islam gained an early foothold, arriving at the kabaka's court in the middle of the 19th century and quickly winning favor with the kabaka himself, Mutesa I. Two camps of Christian missionaries arrived in 1877, following a personal invitation by Mutesa that was relayed to Britain by the explorer Henry Morton Stanley. The kabaka viewed the missionaries as a potential conduit to secure weapons from the Europeans in the event of a war with Egypt and neighboring kingdoms. The Protestant missionaries who arrived from the Church Missionary Society (CMS), and the Catholic White Fathers who followed from France in their wake, became unwitting pawns in a political struggle they did not fully understand. Played off against each other by a Machiavellian and highly factionalized court, their rivalries quickly became violent. Mutesa's less skillful successor, Mwanga, feared that the missionaries were a Trojan horse for a European colonial takeover and oversaw massacres of both Protestants and Catholics. These early Ugandan martyrs assumed symbolic importance and are commemorated by religious communities to this day at a shrine outside Kampala.

In the years that followed, a sectarian conflict broke out involving armed followers of the Protestants, Catholics, and Muslims. The Protestants emerged triumphant in 1892 following a four-year-long civil war, the tipping point coming when Britain declared a protectorate over Buganda through its commercial agent, the Imperial British East Africa Company. According to one senior religious leader, the story of these years established a pattern that endures to this day, whereby "Political motives have always been at the heart of religious dynamics. Control of power has always been at the root of this story."³

Protestant Christianity flourished under the sponsorship of the British during the period of the protectorate, although Catholics and Muslims were allowed to operate without interference and played their part in expanding the imperial reach of Buganda into neighboring kingdoms. CMS schools, funded by the British protectorate, produced the educated elite. It was therefore inevitable—and to the British, ironic—that many of the leaders of the nationalist movement—both Baganda and Ugandan—emerged from this environment. Religious networks proved integral to the development of the nationalist movement. Two of the main political parties that formed in advance of independence in 1962 were religious in origin; the Democratic Party was Catholic while the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) that triumphed in that year's election was dominated by Protestants. The victory of the UPC under the Protestant prime minister Milton Obote solidified the status of the Anglican Church as the denomination most closely allied with political power in Uganda. This relationship has largely been unbroken, apart from the period under Idi Amin Dada (1971–1979), who pursued Muslim sectional interests with bloody consequences

3. Interview with senior religious leader, Kampala, January 30, 2013.

for the church and was notoriously implicated in the murder of Janani Luwum, the Anglican archbishop, in 1977.

Religious institutions, like all Uganda's institutions, were battered during the 1980s, a period of almost unrelenting misery and bloodshed. During the civil war against Obote's brutal second period in office (1980–1985), the military regime that followed, and the coming to power of the National Resistance Movement under Yoweri Museveni in 1986, religious groups spoke out against the unceasing violence but were largely horrified onlookers, with limited influence to bear. In the early years of Museveni's presidency, as yet another insurgency broke out in the north, the church—the Catholic Church in particular—was a persistent advocate of conflict resolution and spoke out about the need for accountability for abuses carried out by government forces as well as the Lord's Resistance Army.

An Overview of the Main Faiths and Denominations

Turning to the present day, an overview of Uganda's main faiths and denominations helps shed light on their contrasting relationships with the Ugandan state as it approaches a third decade of rule by Yoweri Museveni.

ANGLICANS

The Anglican Church, or Church of Uganda, is officially Uganda's second largest religious denomination. In 2002, when the last national census was taken, 36 percent of the population described itself as Anglican.⁴ The Church of Uganda is the church of the establishment, enjoying a level of access to state power and resources that other denominations cannot match. One former senior Anglican leader describes the relationship as “a marriage; a collusion with the state.”⁵ In return for this access, the Anglican Church has largely shied away from taking a public stand on issues the government considers uncomfortable or awkward. It is a relatively poor church, which partly explains its heightened susceptibility to financial inducements from the government. Barring a few exceptions, its leaders gladly take the cars and other government patronage that comes their way because they know their financial status will become insecure upon retirement. It has become a ritual that when a new archbishop or other senior member of the clergy is appointed, they receive a new vehicle from the president. While church leaders argue that the cars are used for official business and are handed back when they leave office, the symbolic representation of state patronage of the church could not be clearer. With the exception of the Idi Amin years, when the Anglican Church was terrorized and Archbishop Luwum was murdered, all of Uganda's postindependence presidents have been Anglican. It is therefore a

4. Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), “2002 Uganda Population and Housing Census,” 11, <http://www.ubos.org/onlinefiles/uploads/ubos/pdf%20documents/2002%20Census%20Final%20Reportdoc.pdf>.

5. Interview with former religious leader, Kampala, January 31, 2013.

church that is unaccustomed to opposing the state and does not know how to do it effectively. Furthermore, there is little sign that it is willing to adopt that role. As a result, it is the most quiescent of all the religious denominations.

Meanwhile, Anglican congregations are dwindling as worshippers head in increasing numbers to the new, fast-expanding Pentecostal churches, particularly in urban areas. This exodus has forced the church to reexamine and update its message and style of worship in order to appeal to young people, who are particularly drawn to the Pentecostal movement and make up the majority (56 percent) of Uganda's population.⁶

CATHOLICS

Catholics are the largest religious denomination in Uganda, comprising 41 percent of the population.⁷ Despite its numerical advantage over other denominations, it has never attained political power to rival the Anglican Church. As a result, according to African religious scholar Kevin Ward, Catholic leaders “felt it better to eschew politics altogether and concentrate on their religious tasks.”⁸ This focus on evangelization and service provision has helped it maintain strength in numbers. It has capitalized on its outsider status to become the church that is closest to the people. It has also been more willing to challenge the secular authorities, taking a more consistent line than other denominations on issues such as good governance and corruption. According to a senior opposition political leader, when President Museveni tried—and succeeded—in 2005 to push for a constitutional amendment that would allow him to remain in office beyond two terms, “only the Catholic Church came out strongly.”⁹

PENTECOSTALS

Pentecostalism in Uganda was heavily influenced by the revivalist Balokole movement that emerged within the Anglican Church in 1930s and which was particularly strong in the western Ankole region, home of the first family. Although only 5 percent of people described their religious affiliation as Pentecostal in the 2002 census, the survey differentiated Pentecostalism from another commonly associated movement, the Assemblies of God, which comprised an additional 1.5 percent of the population. (Pentecostal groups successfully lobbied the government for inclusion as a separate religious category.) Furthermore, the mushrooming of new churches in the past decade, backed by generous funding from the American and European evangelical movement, suggests that congregations have expanded yet further. An evangelist with a large Pentecostal church in Kampala confirmed that a lot of the growth was coming at the expense of the mainline churches: “They only grow by birth; we grow by conversion.”¹⁰ The movement's dynamism, its use of music and

6. In the 2002 census, 56 percent of Ugandans were aged 18 or younger. UBOS, “2002 Uganda Population and Housing Census,” viii.

7. UBOS, “2002 Uganda Population and Housing Census.”

8. Kevin Ward, “A History of Christianity in Uganda,” in *From Mission to Church: A Handbook of Christianity in East Africa*, ed. Zablon Nthamburi (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1991), 15.

9. Interview with opposition political leader, Kampala, February 1, 2013.

10. Interview with evangelist at a Pentecostal church, Kampala, February 5, 2013.

drums, and most of all, its positive message—including the teaching of the prosperity gospel at some churches—attracts worshippers, particularly the poor, women, and young people. Some of its doctrine and elements of its worship, such as the common belief in possession by demons and speaking in tongues, incorporates symbols and themes from African traditional religions and hence feels more authentically “African.”

The growing influence of Pentecostalism is offset by its unstructured nature; unlike the mainline churches, it does not have a hierarchy and a network. This has financial implications because, unlike the established churches, the Pentecostal movement does not enjoy tax-exempt status. Despite these disadvantages, it holds great sway over its congregations, according to the Kampala-based evangelist: “The Pentecostal church is the only church in Uganda that is well organized. One call from a pastor can determine whether people don’t vote or do vote, for example. This is because Pentecostal people are so much attached to the church, rather than just going once a week. It’s an integral part of their lives.”¹¹ This observation is shared by politicians: “Their followers are very loyal,” notes one. “They are obedient to their pastors much more so than other religions.”¹²

Leaders within the Pentecostal movement tend not to envisage a role for themselves in political life. That said, they believe that politics should be influenced by Christian values and this has led to advocacy on so-called moral issues like Uganda’s notorious Anti-Homosexuality Act, which was passed in February 2014 before being thrown out on a technicality by the constitutional court months later.¹³

Despite its professed desire to stay out of politics, the Pentecostal movement has amassed considerable influence on the national stage thanks to its unrivaled access to the first family. The first lady, Janet Museveni, is a born-again Christian and powerful champion; two of the Museveni children run their own churches. In addition, there are a growing number of Pentecostal members of parliament, and church members are encouraged to utilize this network to advocate for policy decisions that are informed by Christian values.¹⁴

An open question is whether or not this influence is more symbolic than substantive. The Pentecostal penchant for prayer breakfasts and ceremonies of national forgiveness for political leaders whose conduct has fallen short of Christian principles (including the president himself, who publicly repented for past sins during the country’s national jubilee commemorations¹⁵) appears to favor show over substance. In his farewell sermon, published by a national newspaper, the outgoing assistant bishop of Kampala in the Church of

11. Ibid.

12. Interview with opposition political leader, Kampala, February 1, 2013.

13. For more details on the law, its implications, and the involvement of religious groups in lobbying for its passage, see Richard Downie, *Revitalizing the Fight against Homophobia in Africa* (Washington, DC: CSIS, May 2014), http://csis.org/files/publication/140506_Downie_HomophobiaAfrica_Web.pdf.

14. Interview with evangelist at a Pentecostal church, Kampala, February 5, 2013.

15. “For the Sins of Uganda, I Repent—Museveni,” NewVision.com, October 18, 2012, <http://www.newvision.co.ug/news/636533-for-the-sins-of-uganda-i-repent-museveni.html>.

Uganda, Bishop Zac Niringiye, addressed this issue, asking his congregation: “What will stop corruption?” His answer was blunt: “It is not more prayers.”¹⁶

MUSLIMS

Official figures suggest that just over 12 percent of the population is Muslim, although community leaders claim the number is far higher.¹⁷ Muslims have traditionally struggled to make their voices heard at the political level. Government policy is partly to blame. Successive governments have sought to open up and exploit divisions within the community in an effort to limit Muslim influence, a practice that dates back to the early years of independence. In 1965, the government sponsored the formation of a Muslim organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Muslims (NAAM), led by an ally of Prime Minister Obote and designed to rival the established body, the Ugandan Muslim Community (UMC). Rivalry between the two organizations assumed ethnic overtones, with Baganda favoring the UMC and non-Baganda supporting the NAAM.¹⁸ These ethnic divisions are replicated in the long-running dispute within the present-day governing body for Muslims, the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council (UMSC). Among the rival camps, the breakaway Kibuli faction is strongly Baganda while the Old Kampala faction is primarily non-Baganda. These divisions, which emerged over personal rivalries and accusations of corrupt land sales, have tended to make the community inward looking and diluted its ability to engage effectively at the national level.

The exception to this story of political irrelevance came during the Idi Amin years, when Islam was strongly backed by the state, as well as by wealthy external sponsors such as Muammar Qaddafi’s Libya. Money, appointments, patronage, and property—some of it confiscated from Ugandan Asians expelled from the country—flowed into the community and Uganda formally joined the ranks of Islamic nations by becoming a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in 1974. At the same time, Amin imposed his authority over the Muslim community by establishing and closely controlling the UMSC. Resentment of Muslims swelled among other religious groups as Amin’s depredations gathered momentum, and a strong backlash followed his departure.

Resentment of Muslims dating back to this period colors public attitudes to this day. Suspicions of Muslims have been heightened due to a number of factors. They include the growth of radical Islam in the 1990s, when the puritanical Tabliq sect gained in popularity and armed Islamist groups like the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) emerged; a more confrontational stance taken toward Islam by Pentecostal groups; and the domestic repercussions of 9/11, which presented President Museveni with an opportunity to position Uganda as a regional partner of the U.S.-led Global War on Terrorism. Uganda’s military intervention in Somalia triggered attacks on Kampala by the Somali terrorist group, Al-Shabaab, in

16. Michael Mubangizi, “God Is Sick and Tired of Us, Says Bishop Niringiye,” *Observer*, June 20, 2012, <http://observer.ug/news-headlines/19502-god-is-sick-and-tired-of-us-says-bishop-niringiye>.

17. UBOS, “2002 Uganda Population and Housing Census,” 11.

18. Phares Mutibwa, *Uganda Since Independence: A Story of Unfulfilled Hopes* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1992), 31.

2010, which in turn led to crackdowns on Uganda's Muslim population, including disappearances and false imprisonment. A commonly held view among Muslims is that they are singled out for harsher treatment than other groups, and that legitimate activities that displease the government are quickly branded as terror-related for purposes of political expediency.

For these reasons, Muslims have been reluctant to speak out on politically sensitive issues and to organize politically. According to one of the few Kampala-based Muslim political activists, "Many Muslims are scared to organize. It's almost a survival strategy not to organize, in order that you don't attract heat."¹⁹ As a result, Muslims are underrepresented in national political life, holding just 6 positions in a cabinet of 76 and 28 members of parliament out of 386.²⁰ Things are starting to change, with young Muslims getting more involved in public life (and bypassing the traditional structures) by setting up nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), writing newspapers, and speaking out on political issues, such as the continued detentions without charge of Muslims accused of ADF membership. Muslims are also beginning to organize politically and starting to appreciate the influence they can potentially wield. "Muslims win elections when they get organized," according to one activist, who observed that 60 percent of women candidates in the Kampala area during the 2011 election were Muslim. Muslims are also making their influence felt in political parties that were traditionally associated with Christian denominations, such as the predominantly Catholic Democratic Party.

State Strategies for Managing Religious Relations

Uganda's secular leaders understand the influence of religious groups and individuals in Uganda and seek to direct their energies in useful ways. Various tools are deployed in order to achieve this objective, including exploiting divisions, co-option, and intimidation.

President Museveni cleverly manipulates religious groups, adopting a policy of divide and rule against the most troublesome or threatening. His frequent remarks about the dangers of sectarianism depict religion as a historic cause of instability that must be kept in check by the secular powers. His exploitation of intra-Muslim tensions is perhaps the best example of religious divide and rule. Upon assuming the presidency, Museveni appears to have made a genuine attempt to heal the rift inside the UMSC, mediating the Mecca Agreement by which the two rival claimants for the post of mufti agreed to step aside in favor of an interim leadership. Subsequent actions, however, have been less statesmanlike. Muslim observers accuse him of provoking disputes by backing one faction in public while secretly supporting the rival one. By so doing, he can then step in to arbitrate them, presenting himself as the savior. "It's a strategic effort to keep people divided," says

19. Interview with Muslim political activist, Kampala, February 1, 2013.

20. Number current as of 2012; see Michael Mubangizi, "Are Muslims Marginalized?," *Observer*, February 29, 2012, http://www.observer.ug/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=17421:are-muslims-marginalised.

one political observer. “He wants to keep the Muslims separated.”²¹ Another political observer characterizes Museveni as an “arsonist fireman,” who lights blazes in order to seek the adulation for putting them out.²²

Co-option is another tool liberally deployed by the NRM government. President Museveni’s method of governance is a massive patronage system that seeks to secure loyalty through gifts, positions, and other handouts. Religious leaders are not immune to these advances and compromise their independence by accepting land, cars, homes, even roofing tiles for new churches and mosques, from the secular authorities. One political opponent of the president observed, “In the last elections, Museveni gave 40 iron roofing sheets to every priest in northern Uganda. He bought motorbikes for others, and gave 100 million shillings (\$38,000) to the church. Every bishop who’s consecrated is presented with an SUV (sport utility vehicle) by the president.”²³ Only the most principled or wealthy resist these gifts. These practices percolate downward to political candidates seeking offices large and small, who attend churches and mosques during election season and publicly give large donations to the collection box in the hope of currying favor.²⁴ As a result, the established churches are “powerless and comfortable,” in the words of one civil society leader. “They are mere appendages of the system”²⁵ who have ceded the moral authority to speak out on perhaps the two most pressing issues in public life—corruption and poor governance—because they themselves are implicated in it.

When religious leaders decide to get engaged in activities or speak out on issues considered off-limits by the government, they are dealt with sternly by the authorities, although a degree of caution is exercised to reflect their elevated status in society. When Bishop Zac Niringiye retired from the Church of Uganda to take part in social justice campaigns and anticorruption drives, he immediately became a target for arrest and intimidation. In February 2013, he was detained while handing out leaflets for the Black Monday campaign, a civil society initiative against public graft. He was released shortly afterward following a public outcry.

It would be wrong to suggest, however, that religious groups in Uganda are entirely directed and pushed around by the secular authorities. The battle for influence cuts both ways. Religious groups trade their cooperation with the state for access and influence, as well as material resources. One political leader notes that because of its symbiotic relationship with government, the church—the Church of Uganda in particular—is an effective lobbyist, maneuvering its people into positions in government. “They’re good at trading their support for privilege, business, and appointments. And they also lobby for state

21. Interview with Muslim political observer, Kampala, February 1, 2013.

22. Interview with another political observer, Kampala, February 1, 2013.

23. Interview with opposition politician, Kampala, February 1, 2013.

24. See Bernard Tabaire and Jackie Okao, *Politics of Patronage and Religion in Uganda: Synthesis Report of the Proceedings of the 9th Session of the State of the Nation Platform*, ACODE Policy Dialogue Series No. 13 (Kampala: Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment [ACODE], 2010), 8, http://www.acode-u.org/documents/PDS_13.pdf.

25. Interview with civil society leader, Kampala, January 31, 2013.

projects, such as roads, to be built in their diocese.”²⁶ A political adviser to the ruling party highlights the prominent role that religious leaders play in selecting parliamentary candidates, whereby, for example, a constituency with a Catholic majority will demand that only Catholic candidates run for office.²⁷

Religious Engagement in Public Policy and Politics: Modes, Methods, and Issues

Religious groups also use their influence to engage the secular authorities on substantive policy issues. These efforts have ebbed and flowed over time. At particular moments in history, religious institutions have played a leading role in politics. During the latter days of Idi Amin’s rule, Christian denominations united to speak out against abuses, and took severe punishment for doing so. But their stridency and influence has waned in the Museveni era, as the years have turned into decades. In 2005, an interfaith effort was made to oppose the president’s efforts to dispense with term limits, based on public opinion surveys conducted by the ecumenical body, the Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC). Strong statements were issued, but in recent years the criticism has become more oblique, even in private. A prominent religious leader, when asked in a background interview whether President Museveni’s longevity in office is good for Uganda, answers cautiously. “Change of power is very transparent in the church. This is a very good example the government can learn from.”²⁸

MODES AND MEANS OF ENGAGEMENT: FROM INTERFAITH EFFORTS TO GOING IT ALONE

It is important to distinguish between the various ways in which religious interests and groups engage in politics. The methods include private discussion between religious actors and state officials or politicians; the publication of research papers and policy positions by religious organizations and interfaith groups; and the use of the pulpit to expound on political or semipolitical topics such as corruption and economic inequality. There have also been attempts to pursue sectarian interests through political parties. Perhaps the best example of this is the Justice Forum, commonly known as Jeema, a political party whose leadership is largely Muslim. Jeema claims to have diversified its base, but many view it as a Muslim religious party. The government has accused it of being a front for the ADF.

The mechanisms for engagement also vary. There are collaborative approaches through umbrella interfaith or intra-faith organizations, there are efforts by specific denominations, and there are efforts by individual religious leaders. Advocacy as a group can have more impact through strength in numbers but internal differences tend to dilute policy positions and statements.

26. Interview with political leader, Kampala, February 1, 2013.

27. Interview with NRM official, February 1, 2013.

28. Interview with religious leader, Kampala, January 29, 2013.

There are two main interfaith groups in Uganda: the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) includes the main faiths, while the UJCC is an umbrella group for Christian denominations. Both organizations have carried out useful research on policy issues such as natural resource management, conflict resolution, gender mainstreaming, and effective treatment of HIV/AIDS. The UJCC has been involved in election monitoring and civic education. While both the IRCU and UJCC are well-respected institutions in Uganda, their ability and willingness to take a stand on controversial issues is fairly limited. Many in civil society and political life (particularly those in opposition to the NRM) accuse them of weakness. They highlight the stance taken by the IRCU during the Walk to Work protests that erupted over rising food and fuel prices shortly after the 2011 elections. The government banned the protests, severely beating and arresting protestors—including the opposition leader Kizza Besigye—on several occasions. Rather than calling on the government to respect its citizens' right to peaceful assembly, the IRCU called on Dr. Besigye to call off the protests in the interests of public safety. The IRCU defends its role, stating that it does not wish to be seen as “the voice of opposition on everything” and arguing that it led talks behind the scenes that helped calm tensions on both sides.²⁹ But a leading human rights campaigner in Kampala derides the position it took, describing it as “Amazing,” adding, “The Inter-Religious Council is more interested in harmonious relations than governance.”³⁰ In 2014, the IRCU became embroiled in a controversy that threatens its very existence. Following the passage of Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act, the IRCU's public advocacy on behalf of the law came under scrutiny from Western donors. As a result, its leading funder, the United States Agency for International Development, withdrew financial support, a decision which led to its entire permanent staff being laid off.³¹

While interfaith forums provide a platform for religious groups to articulate common positions, there are many areas where consensus is not possible and where, as a result, individual faith groups and denominations choose to pursue their own policy agendas. Uganda's Muslims have a number of community priorities that are not shared with—indeed are opposed by—the church. These campaigns tend to focus on issues of perceived injustice where Muslims are discriminated against or neglected by the state. One of the most prominent examples is the effort to protect, strengthen, and receive state support for the Kadhi courts system, to which many Muslims turn for the adjudication of civil cases. Christian groups vehemently oppose any move to increase support for these courts, claiming it would signal the creeping Islamization of the state. While there was talk early in 2013 that members of parliament would consider a draft bill to manage the courts, the issue appears to have stalled.³² A second issue that has galvanized Muslim opinion is the demand for rule of law to be observed in cases where Muslims are suspected of terrorism. Human rights groups, with support from Ugandan Muslim journalists and activists, have monitored scores of cases where suspects have been tortured and held indefinitely in

29. Interview with Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) official, Kampala, January 28, 2013.

30. Interview with Ugandan human rights campaigner, Kampala, January 29, 2013.

31. Sadab Kitatta Kaaya, “Anti-Gay Group Fires All Staff,” *Observer*, August 18, 2014, http://www.observer.ug/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=33371:anti-gay-group-fires-all-staff.

32. See Gloria Nakajubi, “Muslims Push for Khadi Courts Bill,” *NewVision.com*, January 11, 2013, <http://www.newvision.co.ug/news/638815-muslims-push-for-khadi-courts-bill.html>.

illegal detention centers without charges being brought against them.³³ While neither of these campaigns has brought tangible rewards for Muslims, they suggest that the community is becoming more forthright in engaging with state authorities on controversial issues.

In most cases, the most forthright engagement by religious actors on political issues has come not from interfaith groups or specific faiths or denominations but from individual religious leaders. One of the most outspoken individuals, Zac Niringiye, has subsequently retired from the Anglican Church, where he held the position of assistant archbishop of Kampala, to take up full time advocacy on social and political issues. His decision to do so says something about the constraints imposed by his position and institution upon his ability to speak and act freely. However, in his last sermon, Bishop Niringiye used the power of the pulpit to full effect, pulling no punches in his demand for political change. “President Yoweri Museveni, you have done this country proud, you did a lot of wonderful works, but set up a process where elections happen, please step down, please retire honorably, be the first president who surrenders power peacefully.”³⁴

ISSUES OF ENGAGEMENT AND OUTCOMES

While religious institutions have held back from engaging the secular authorities on a number of issues of political importance, particularly the most contentious ones such as Uganda’s increasingly poor governance record, there are several areas of national interest where they have played a prominent role. These include the public debates on how best to manage Uganda’s natural resource endowment and the demands for accountability for abuses committed by both sides during the conflict with the Lord’s Resistance Army in the north. Most controversially, religious groups have taken the lead in demanding tougher criminal penalties against members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community, presenting their campaign as a response to a social threat to the Ugandan way of life imposed upon the country by Western donors. The effectiveness of their engagements in these three different areas has been determined to a large extent by the degree to which they align with the priorities of the secular authorities, the executive in particular. Religious groups, in common with other institutions in Uganda, struggle to impose their views on a domineering presidency. For the first two issues, little progress was made because they conflicted with the interests of the government. In the latter case, the executive saw an opportunity to secure a political advantage by riding the bigotry bandwagon. Only later, when international outrage began to have a material impact on donor assistance, did the president try to contain the campaign.

Natural Resource Management

Since large deposits of oil were discovered beneath the waters of Lake Albert in western Uganda, a lively and often contentious public debate has played out about how best to

33. See for example, Human Rights Watch, *Open Secret: Illegal Detention and Torture by the Joint Anti-Terrorism Task Force in Uganda* (New York: Human Rights Watch, April 2009), <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/uganda0409web.pdf>.

34. Mubangizi, “God Is Sick and Tired of Us, Says Bishop Niringiye.”

ensure these resources are developed in a way that will lead to sustainable, broad-based economic growth in which ordinary people derive benefit. This issue has assumed national importance because of fears that oil revenues may merely provide an additional source of patronage for a well-connected elite, further fueling corruption. Religious institutions have been at the forefront of these debates, organizing public forums, conducting research, and producing policy papers to inform government policy. A well-regarded paper by the IRCU laid out the argument that oil was a gift from God, which must be used wisely. At stages along the process, religious leaders forged alliances with reform-minded members of parliament, pushing for transparent structures to be set up by the government to manage oil contracts and revenues. These efforts were thwarted, however, when the final version of the petroleum bill gave the energy minister sole authority to grant or revoke oil licenses. It was passed by the National Assembly in December 2012 after President Museveni made clear his support for the bill. Critics of the IRCU accused the organization of failing to follow through on its policy paper and toning down its criticism once the president had voiced his opinion on the matter.³⁵ But although the petroleum bill did not include the robust transparency mechanisms demanded, religious groups and their allies in civil society did succeed in elevating the issue of natural resource management to the top of the political agenda. As one civil society leader and journalist puts it, “the bill has been so controversial that every discussion will be fought over in public, which will offer some protection. The process has become more consultative. The level of debate here on oil is incredible.”³⁶

Conflict Resolution

One area where religious groups have consistently spoken out has been in calling for a peaceful settlement of the conflict with the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), a focus on the needs of the victims, and accountability for human rights abuses that occurred. In particular, the Catholic Church has led the charge in demanding investigations into alleged atrocities by government troops from the Uganda People’s Defense Forces (UPDF) in the north, its religious heartland. The head of the Catholic Church in Uganda, the Most Reverend John-Baptist Odama, has long been involved in peacemaking efforts in the north. Prior to his appointment in 2010, he helped mediate the (ultimately unsuccessful) negotiations between LRA leaders and the government. As a result, he commands respect on this issue. According to one civil society activist and lawyer, “When the archbishop speaks, the government holds its breath.”³⁷

However, outreach on the LRA issue has been a broadly interfaith effort, beginning with the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative in the late 1990s, which initiated contact with LRA leaders and secured an amnesty agreement in 2000 for rebel fighters who agreed to surrender. A senior figure in the Church of Uganda cites the LRA conflict as “a good example of how the church drove an issue of national and political importance. The role of

35. Interview with civil society leader, Kampala, January 31, 2013.

36. Interview with civil society activist and journalist, Kampala, January 31, 2013.

37. Interview with civil society activist and lawyer, Kampala, January 31, 2013.

the IRCU in peacemaking was respected. We pushed for dialogue with the LRA and the churches talked with one voice.”³⁸ The conflict has subsequently entered a quieter phase and the LRA threat has migrated outside Uganda’s borders. However, the issues of peace, reconciliation, and justice lie unresolved, despite the dedicated efforts of religious groups. One of the main stumbling blocks to success has been the intransigence of the warring parties and the government’s insistence on pursuing a military solution to the conflict; one that attracts lucrative external funding and security assistance from the United States. While the larger objectives of religious groups have been frustrated, their dogged engagement with the government has kept the LRA issue on the agenda and the plight of its victims in the spotlight. It may also have helped shape government perceptions of their adversaries, which according to the IRCU led to shifts in strategy during later stages of the conflict: “Many of those in the LRA were victims of the LRA before they became perpetrators. The UPDF was treating them as perpetrators and was killing them. We wanted them to stop; eventually the government bought into it.”³⁹

Anti-Homosexuality Act

Religious institutions have been at their most confident and forthright when tackling issues related to social morals rather than political rights. In their endeavors, their advocacy has led to tangible—and controversial—outcomes. Their success in lobbying for tougher criminal penalties for homosexual conduct is intrinsically linked to the fact that they found willing partners to work with in the Ugandan legislature and managed to secure the support of President Museveni himself. Religious leaders such as Pastor Martin Ssempe were at the forefront of the effort but it would be a mistake to present the campaign against Uganda’s LGBT community as the work of a few rogue elements within the church; it received institutional backing from the main religious denominations and vocal support from the IRCU.

There is little evidence that President Museveni was personally persuaded of the moral argument for lengthy prison sentences for homosexual conduct. Instead, he concluded that it was politically expedient to align himself with the campaign by signing the Anti-Homosexuality Act in February 2014.⁴⁰ The campaign against homosexuality led by religious groups (and partly funded by Western evangelical organizations) is a rare case of nongovernmental actors forcing the agenda, leading President Museveni rather than being manipulated by him. Indeed, President Museveni has struggled to reign them in as international opprobrium has mounted and donor funds have dried up. Uganda’s constitutional court provided him with an escape route by throwing out the law on a technicality in August 2014. Lawmakers immediately announced plans to introduce a new bill.

38. Interview with leading figure in the Church of Uganda, Kampala, January 31, 2013.

39. Interview with IRCU official, Kampala, January 29, 2013.

40. For more details of the political calculations behind President Museveni’s decision, see Downie, *Revitalizing the Fight against Homophobia in Africa*, 5.

Conclusion

Religious institutions are influential players in Ugandan society. Their opinions count and they have contributed in important ways to debates on issues of political and social importance, such as natural resource management, conflict resolution, and—controversially—LGBT rights. However, there is a prevailing sense that on the most pressing issues of the day—poor governance, rampant corruption, and the absence of a political transition away from President Museveni or his family—Uganda’s religious institutions shy away from confrontation. Instead, NGOs lead the charge on political and human rights issues; as a result, they bear the brunt of the government’s antipathy. Civil society activists tend to view religious institutions as part of the establishment, and therefore part of the problem. As one NGO leader puts it: “Some of them don’t command the same respect of the public as they used to. Their authority has diminished; it’s a process that’s gone on for many years but they’ve been slowly compromised.”⁴¹

The reticence of religious groups can be explained by the fact that the main Christian denominations have been thoroughly co-opted by the state-run patrimonial system. Muslims, who are already viewed with suspicion by the authorities, do not wish to make their lives even more uncomfortable by risking confrontation. This latter position is being challenged by younger Muslims and new, more reformist movements outside the UMSC, but this is a recent shift—one that the government has tried to neuter by blanketing its opponents as terrorists.

The reality of power politics in Uganda is that there are only two institutions that really matter: the NRM and the military. Outsiders struggle to impose views that challenge the grip of these institutions on public life. Those who oppose the government face a stark choice: (1) give up the struggle in return for a quiet life and possibly a comfortable position or (2) keep fighting and face isolation or even retribution. Most religious leaders have chosen the former option; only a few have the energy, commitment, resources, or bravery to stay the latter course. A third group tries to play a double game, complying with the authorities while offering tacit support to their opponents. One opposition politician who has been arrested and harassed by the authorities explained, “All of the churches want to keep me at arms’ length in public but in private we have a lot of interaction. They tell me they think what I am doing is good but warn me to be careful.”⁴²

In its interaction with religious constituencies, the government likes to have its cake and eat it too. Its message to Christian and Muslim leaders is to confine themselves to spiritual matters and leave worldly concerns to the secular authorities. In reality, the government has no qualms about allowing religious institutions to fill the yawning public service gap that has opened up in the health and education systems because of its own mismanagement and corruption. However, as soon as religious leaders speak out on issues

41. Interview with civil society leader, Kampala, February 1, 2013.

42. Interview with opposition politician, Kampala, February 1, 2013.

of public concern like corruption or good governance, they are warned in no uncertain terms to stay out of politics.

Looking ahead, there are few signs to suggest that religious groups will become more assertive in taking on policy issues that challenge the status quo. Indeed, they do not wish to assume the role of political agitators. Civil society in general is coming under growing pressure from the Ugandan authorities and the scope for free expression is constricting rather than expanding. Individuals like Bishop Zac Niringiye, a religious leader who has confronted the authorities with awkward questions about governance, corruption, and political decay, remain the exception rather than the norm. In the pessimistic view of one civil society leader, “I don’t see an Archbishop Tutu emerging in Uganda. Religious leaders here don’t take a stand.”⁴³

43. Interview with civil society leader, Kampala, February 1, 2013.

4 | The Politics of Ethno-Religious Balancing and the Struggle for Power in Nigeria

M. Sani Umar

Overview

A key peculiarity of Nigerian politics is rooted in the religious demography of the country. Indeed, Nigerian politics is hardly comprehensible without adequate attention to the divide between Muslims and Christians, which has shaped the country's governance structures since colonial times. The amalgamation of diverse ethnic, cultural, regional, and religious communities into the modern Nigerian state has necessitated—and in some ways been made possible by—negotiation among political elites and a careful balancing to ensure that no regional, ethnic, or religious community feels permanently excluded from the structures of national power. Emerging as a consensus among political elites, the aspiration for political inclusion has become enshrined in Section 14, subsections 3 and 4 of Nigeria's constitution:

(3) The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few State or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that Government or in any of its agencies.

(4) The composition of the Government of a State, a local government council, or any of the agencies of such Government or council, and the conduct of the affairs of the Government or council or such agencies shall be carried out in such manner as to recognise [*sic*] the diversity of the people within its area of authority and the need to promote a sense of belonging and loyalty among all the people of the Federation.

This constitutional mandate, known as the “principle of federal character,” led to the establishment of the Federal Character Commission via the Federal Character Commission Act of December 1995. This statutory agency is charged with the responsibility of articulating an “equitable formula” for achieving several specific objectives that include:

To promote, monitor, and enforce compliance with the principles of proportional sharing of all bureaucratic, economic, media, and political posts at all levels of government;

Redressing the problems of imbalances and reducing the fear of relative deprivation and marginalization in the Nigerian system of federalism as it obtains in the public and private sectors.¹

These constitutional, legal, and bureaucratic requirements for maintaining balance among the diverse communities of Nigeria are important parts of the exigencies of Nigeria's federal structure. The consolidation of democracy has made the need for such balancing even more salient, leading to the emergence of what I term the politics of regional, ethnic, and religious balancing: the strong expectation that fairness and even-handedness are indispensable in the distribution of positions of power and public goods.

At the same time, democratization has taken on a more visible, public role in Nigeria's political discourse. Nigeria saw a surge in religious activism during the 1980s and 1990s, as structural adjustment reforms and military rule created considerable hardships for many middle- and working-class Nigerians and a decline in the provision of basic services. Economic privation and the retreat of the state during that period drove many Nigerians to turn to religion and to religious authorities for solace and structure. With the end of military rule and the return to democracy in 1999, religious activists, including militant fundamentalists, have increased their visibility in the public sphere. New technologies and increased media freedoms have given religious actors greater reach into communities, and the country has seen a proliferation of new religious movements and leaders who are able to mobilize followers on a far grander scale. These developments have also attracted the attention of politicians to religious communities and groups, particularly during electoral seasons.

Religion, Governance, and the Evolution of Nigerian Federalism

Interactions between religion and politics have long and deep historical roots in the ancient communities and polities that evolved in the areas of present-day Nigeria. African indigenous religions played a critical role in political and social development in the precolonial era, and Islam and Christianity, introduced respectively from the north and from the southern coast, added a regional dimension to politico-religious development as well. Distinct modes of governance between northern and southern Nigeria by colonial administrators and the emergence of the federal model—first entrenched in a colonial constitution in 1946—helped drive and sustain ethno-regional competition and the corresponding religious divide.

1. Federal Character Commission Establishment Act, <http://lawnigeria.com/lawsofthefederation/federal-character-commission-establishment-act.html>.

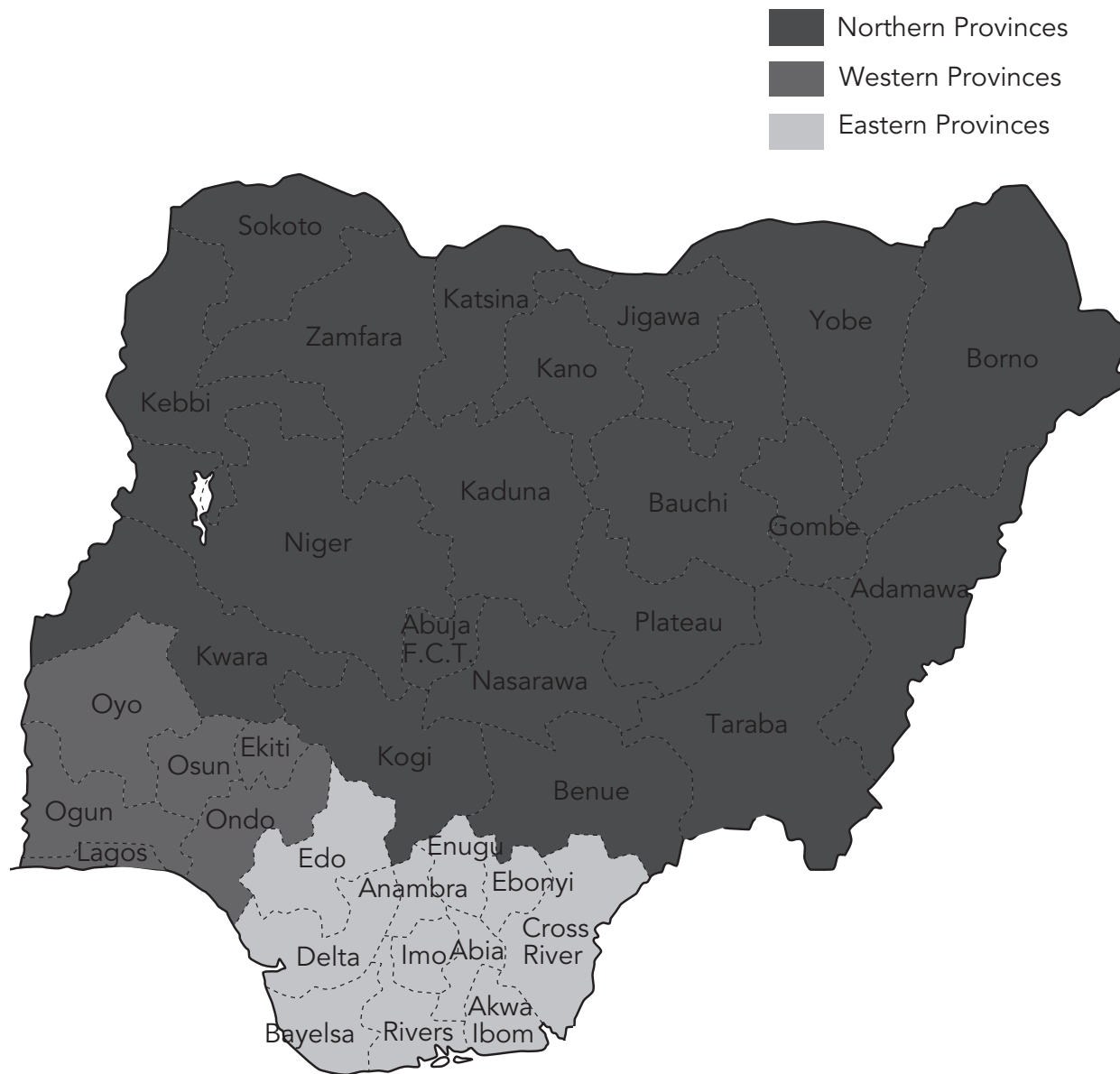
Beginning in the 12th century in the ancient kingdom of Kanem-Borno (in Nigeria's present-day North East geopolitical zone), Islam played a critical role in the evolution of the various polities in Nigeria's northern regions. It reached its highest political influence in the Sokoto Caliphate, an Islamic theocracy that, beginning in 1804, encompassed much of what is today northern Nigeria. The caliphate fell to British forces in 1903, but Britain governed the new Protectorate of Northern Nigeria by giving limited authority to traditional authorities and local emirs, thus preserving to some extent existing religio-political structures. The Islamic legacies of the Sokoto Caliphate and subsequent colonial rule remain highly salient to the politics of contemporary Nigeria.

In contrast with the direct impact of Islam on political development and authority in the north, the impact of Christianity has been felt more in the creation of a modern elite educated through Christian missionary schools, many members of which eventually became influential in the politics of modern Nigeria. Christianity in Nigeria can be traced to the late 15th century, when Portuguese explorers and traders, accompanied by Roman Catholic priests, reached the ancient kingdom of Benin in Nigeria's present-day South East geopolitical zone. However, it was not until the middle of the 19th century that the real and lasting impact of Christianity began to register in the areas on the Atlantic coast. Beginning with the conquest and colonization of Lagos in the mid-1800s, the British colonial government extended its influence further inland into Yoruba-speaking areas, paving the way for Christian missionaries, both Protestant and Catholic. The British eventually merged their acquisitions in southeast and southwest Nigeria, creating in 1906 the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria.

In 1914, the two protectorates (Protectorate of Northern Nigeria and the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria) were amalgamated into one colonial entity ruled by a governor-general and two lieutenant governors, one charged with the north and the other with the south. Initially driven by economic considerations, the consolidation of the two protectorates into one colonial jurisdiction did not mean political unification, and no uniform administration developed in either of the two protectorates.² In 1939, the British administration once again divided the Southern Protectorate into two administrative units, thereby creating the tripartite administrative division of Nigeria into the Eastern Provinces, Northern Provinces, and Western Provinces, each functioning separately under its own lieutenant governor. In theory, the lieutenant governors were politically answerable to the governor-general, but in practice, they were essentially autonomous. Although the Northern Provinces were collectively larger in territory and population and more diverse in ethnic and religious composition (see Figure 1) than both the Eastern Provinces and Western Provinces, the British left the region intact. The outcome, reinforced in the "Richards" constitution of 1946 (named for Governor General Sir Arthur Richards), was a lopsided administrative and political structure more favorable to the Northern

2. T. N. Tamuno, "British Colonial Administration in Nigeria in the Twentieth Century," in *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, ed. Obaro Ikime (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1980), 395.

Figure 1. Nigeria's 1939 administrative units: Northern Provinces, Western Provinces, and Eastern Provinces (with present-day state boundaries).

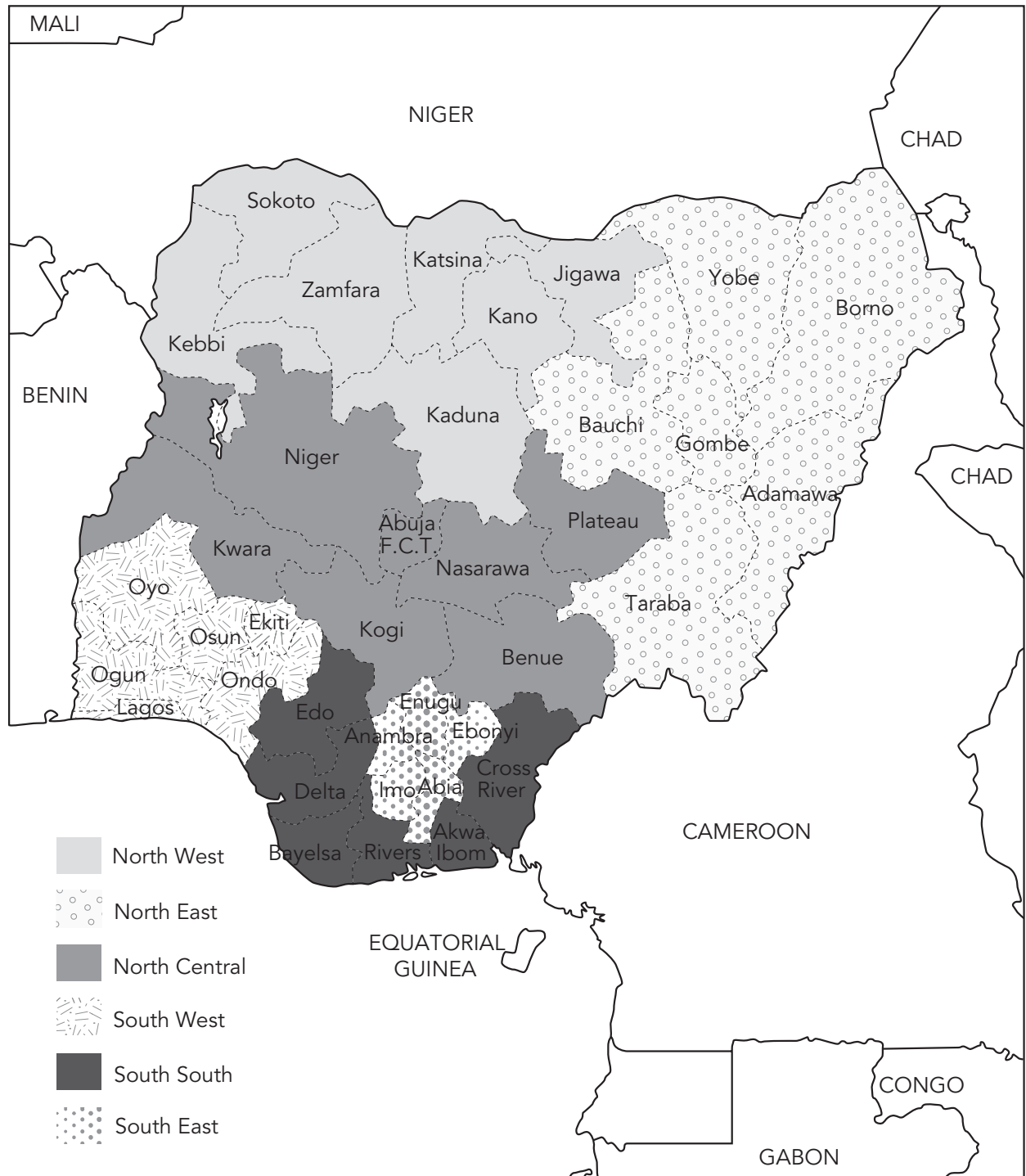


Protectorate provinces. This “landmark in the constitutional development of Nigeria”³ formally launched the country on the path to federalism, but with a federation based on a very uneven balance of regional units (see Figure 2), each with very different histories of politico-religious interaction.

At the time of independence in 1960, the lopsided administrative and political structure that had evolved under British colonial rule allowed the Northern Provinces region of Nigeria to dominate national electoral politics because of its sheer size and population.

3. G. O. Olusanya, “Constitutional Development in Nigeria, 1861–1960,” in *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, ed. Obaro Ikime (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1980), 525.

Figure 2. Nigeria's six present-day geopolitical zones: North West, North East, North Central, South West, South South, and South East.



Equally important was the colonial legacy of ruling the three administrative units separately, thereby limiting political integration and facilitating the emergence of strong ethno-regional identities rather than a collective Nigerian national identity. Different levels of economic development and modern educational attainment led to different political agendas among

the political elites from the three ethno-regional blocks, while historical, cultural, linguistic, and religious differences created different political perspectives as well. These colonial legacies imposed severe strains on Nigerian politics in the immediate aftermath of independence. The uneven regional structure ultimately proved unworkable, eventually collapsing and leading to the Nigerian civil war from 1967 to 1970.

In the aftermath of the civil war, Nigerian federalism was reconstituted by creating twelve states out of the failed tripartite regional structure; subsequent restructuring has led to the present structure of 36 states. Despite the continuing reconfiguration of the Nigerian federation, the pull of ethno-regionalism has remained strong. The corresponding divide between Muslims and Christians—operating on the guesstimate of a 50–50 divide—further strengthens the pull.

The Politics of Religio-Ethnic Balancing

The conventional wisdom is that, aside from a small minority of adherents of African indigenous religions, Nigeria's population is evenly divided between Muslims and Christians, with Muslims predominant in the northern parts of the country and Christians predominant in the southern and eastern parts. In fact, there is a considerable—and to some extent deliberate—uncertainty around these numbers. Religious affiliation has been omitted from the national census since 1963, a pointer to the centrality of religious demographics to Nigerian politics and the sensitivity around the question of which religious community constitutes a national majority. Majority/minority status has significant implications, especially in the distribution of political power and economic resources. Neither Christians nor Muslims will accept any census figures that do not accord them the majority. In the absence of reliable census data on religious affiliation, Nigerian politics operates on an unspoken assumption of a 50–50 divide between Muslims and Christians; this assumption lies at the heart of what I call the politics of balancing religious, ethnic, and regional constituencies.

The serious limitations of the conventional 50–50 Christian–Muslim divide have led to the new geopolitics of dividing the country into six geopolitical zones (see Figure 2). The northwest zone is largely populated by Hausa-Fulani Muslims, but other ethnic groups are also found, especially in the state of Kebbi, and there are also many Christians in each of the six states. In the southwest zone, the overwhelming majority of inhabitants are from the Yoruba ethnic group, among whom there are as many Muslims as there are Christians. It is common among the Yoruba to find Muslims and Christians within the same family. The southeast zone is largely inhabited by the Igbo ethnic group, who are mostly Christians, but with some numbers of Igbo converts to Islam.⁴ The northeast and north-central zones have considerable ethnic and religious diversities, without any one being in the majority. The south-south zone is ethnically diverse, although Christians are in the majority.

4. Egodì Uchendu, "Being Igbo and Muslim: The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria and Conversion to Islam, 1930s to Present Times," *Journal of African History* 51, no. 1 (2010): 63–87.

Although not enshrined in the Nigerian constitution, the six geopolitical zones have become the effective basis of sharing power and resources. The six most senior positions in the Nigerian government—president, vice president, president of the Senate, speaker of the House of Representatives, secretary to the Federal Government, and chair of the ruling party—are held by individuals from each of the six zones; the same distribution is replicated at the lower ranks. At the same time, however, these positions are evenly divided among Muslims and Christians, a testament to the political importance—and sensitivity—attached to ethno-religious balancing.

When the politics of ethno-religious balancing works positively, it manifests in the expectation of even-handed inclusion of Muslims and Christians in all key political positions. Negatively, it manifests in discontent and acrimony, particularly if either Muslims or Christians feel that they are not fairly and adequately represented in the positions of power. Of the 14 presidents who have ruled Nigeria since independence from Britain in 1960, only the regime of General Muhammadu Buhari and General Tunde Idiagbon (1983–1985) had Muslims as both president and vice president. The elections of 1993, won by Moshood Abiola and Baba Gana Kingibe, would have been the second regime with a Muslim president and vice president. Military leader Ibrahim Babangida annulled the elections, however, and the two men never took office. All important political positions and appointments in the public civil service, especially the military and other security agencies, are expected to reflect a 50–50 sharing between Muslims and Christians. If this even-handed distribution of power appears to be absent, then discontent will be loudly voiced by politicians, journalists, civil society, and faith-based organizations, as well as religious leaders of whichever community has less share in the positions, and the discontent can easily snowball into acrimony and tension.

The 2014 National Conference provided a telling illustration of the politics of ethno-religious balancing. Held one century after the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates, the conference was tasked with suggesting political reforms to mitigate the country's deepening economic, regional, and socio-political challenges. Its launch immediately generated complaints from Muslim participants and leaders over the composition of the delegates. Of the 497 delegates, only 184 were Muslims. Mohammed Haruna, a prominent Muslim journalist and commentator, called the lower number of Muslim delegates a “blatant act of injustice.”⁵ The Sultan of Sokoto, considered the spiritual leader of Nigerian Muslims, led a delegation of prominent Muslims to see President Goodluck Jonathan to persuade him to rectify the lopsided composition of the delegates to the national conference. The president invoked the distribution of power and resources based on the six geopolitical zones to avoid changing the composition of the delegates. When delegates were divided into working committees, not enough members volunteered to serve on the committee on religion. Even the six delegates representing the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the six delegates representing the Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs

5. Mohammed Haruna, “Muslims and the National Conference: The Case of Blaming the Victim,” *Daily Trust*, April 9, 2014, <http://dailytrust.com.ng/news/wednesday-column/muslims-and-the-national-conference-the-case-of-blaming-the-victim/43343.html>.

(NSCIA) demurred. In fact, the secretary-general of the NSCIA, who was also the leader of the Muslim delegates, protested against his inclusion in the committee on religion.⁶ Neither CAN nor NSCIA submitted any memoranda to the committee on religion. Yet delegates managed to make the national conference “embroiled in confusion after its inauguration over religious-related issues that included composition of delegates, mode of prayer, [and] places of worship.”⁷ In contrast, the most over-subscribed committee was the one on political reform and devolution of power. Clearly, while it is not always the paramount dimension of Nigerian politics, the politics of ethno-religious balancing is always present, even if only as a bargaining chip or an irritant.

Ethno-religious balancing is also entrenched in local politics in different parts of the country. In states and local government areas, it is increasingly popular for local politicians to stake their claim to power and resources by arguing for the need to maintain even-handed distribution of power and resources among the different religious communities in the area. Even in states and local government areas with one dominant religious community, it is still expected that even-handedness will prevail among the different ethnic communities in the area or among the different territorial divisions in cases where the local population belong to one and the same ethnic group and religious community.⁸ These manifestations of the politics of ethno-religious balancing at the state and local levels are indicative of the wide acceptance of the expectation for even-handed distribution of economic resources, political power, perquisites of office, as well as the assertion of cultural identities and communal autonomy in local politics across Nigeria.

It is worth highlighting that the constitutional principle of federal character is not explicitly premised on balancing religious constituencies; in fact, the constitutional provision does not even mention religion, presumably subsuming it under “other sectional groups.” Yet the religious identity of individuals representing the diverse constituencies to be balanced is critical politically.

The Complexity of Religious, Ethnic, and Regional Identity

There is considerable diversity within and between the two dominant religious communities, making the assumption of a 50–50 split—and the politics of balancing—even more

6. Nuruddeen M. Abdallah, “NSCIA, CAN Shun Religion C’ttee, Submit No Memo,” *Daily Trust*, April 30, 2014, <http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/daily/national-conference/22919-nscia-can-shun-religion-c-ttee-submit-no-memo>. Also see Francis Okeke, “Most Christian Delegates Avoided Religion Committee—Secretariat,” *Daily Trust*, April 24, 2014, <http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/daily/national-conference/22472-most-christian-delegates-avoided-religion-committee-secretariat>.

7. Abdallah, “NSCIA, CAN Shun Religion C’ttee, Submit No Memo.”

8. Garba Muhammad and Birnin Kebbi, “Why We Demand Power Shift in Kebbi—Dikki,” *Daily Trust*, April 30, 2014, <http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/politics/why-we-demand-power-shift-in-kebbi-dikki/45076.html>. Also see “We’re Marginalised in Southern Borno—Bassi,” *National Beacon*, April 25, 2014, <http://www.nationalbeacononline.com/index.php/special-interview/item/1496-we-re-marginalised-in-southern-borno-bassi>.

complex. Broad characterizations about Christians or Muslims in Nigeria are difficult and often misleading. Within Christianity, Catholics and Protestants have historically been strong, with their roots in the European missions of the colonial era. In more recent years, numerous independent churches have broken away from the Catholic and Protestant churches, attracting followers in the millions. Pentecostal and charismatic churches have proliferated since the 1980s, amassing huge congregations.⁹ Similarly, diversity among Muslims is not confined to a divide between Sufis and Salafis, or Sunnis and Shi'a, since some Muslim groups identify with neither.¹⁰ Even more diverse are the followers of indigenous African religions, for which there are no statistics, and formal adherence to Christianity or Islam does not necessarily preclude the practice of indigenous religions.

Beyond religious diversity within each community, the Nigerian Muslim–Christian divide is often used as a convenient trope that abbreviates numerous other cleavages, including different ethnic identities, cultural and linguistic groups, historical legacies, and political traditions. It often alludes to regional differences between the northern parts of the country where Muslims are predominant, and the southern parts of the country where Christians are the majority. Even this regional shorthand is inaccurate, because there are substantial numbers of Christians in the northern parts of the country just as there are numerous Muslims in the southern parts of the country. Given the many dimensions concealed in the conventional wisdom of a 50–50 Christian–Muslim divide, it is not surprising that the politics of ethno-religious balancing is often contentious and acrimonious: there are more than religious issues at stake. Apart from fierce competition for economic resources and the perquisites of power, deeply held views of cultural identity, communal autonomy, and historical legacies are also involved, as highlighted briefly above.

Positive and Negative Manifestations of Politics of Ethno-Religious Balancing

The collapse of Nigeria's first republic (1960–1965), and the subsequent civil war (1967–1970) are extreme examples of the negative functioning of the politics of ethno-religious balancing. In addition to the lopsided tripartite regional structure of Nigeria's federalism at independence, as well as economic and educational disparities, fears of regional and ethno-religious marginalization and domination were undoubtedly among the aggravating factors. Political elites from the three protectorate regions engaged in a fierce competition for power at the national level while maintaining a monopoly of power in their respective regions: winner-takes-all attitudes discarded the imperative of power sharing, thereby

9. Musa A. B. Gaiya, "The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria," Centre of African Studies, University of Copenhagen, July 2002, 1–33, http://teol.ku.dk/cas/publications/publications/occ._papers/gaiya2002.pdf. Also see the website of the Nigeria Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Center at <http://www.nigeriapentecostalcentre.org/index.html>; and Pew Research Center, "Historical Overview of Pentecostalism in Nigeria," *Spirit and Power—A 10 Country Survey of Pentecostals*, October 2006, <http://www.pewforum.org/2006/10/05/historical-overview-of-pentecostalism-in-nigeria/>.

10. M. N. Alkali, A. K. Monguno, and B. S. Mustafa, "Overview of Islamic Actors in Northeastern Nigeria," Nigeria Research Network (NRN), Oxford Department of International Development, January 2012, <http://www3.geh.ox.ac.uk/pdf/nrn/WP2Alkali.pdf>.

fostering fear, distrust, and animosity. The tragedy of the civil war is one of the strong incentives for the popular expectation that balancing regional, ethnic, and religious constituency is indispensable for the unity, stability, and prosperity of Nigeria. The failure of the civil war to divide the country along regional and ethno-religious lines and the subsequent policies of reconstruction, rehabilitation, and reintegration of the secessionists are excellent examples of the positive functioning of the politics of ethno-religious balancing.

Similarly, after decades of military misrule brought Nigeria to the brink of collapse, the politics of ethno-religious balancing helped avert another threat to the continuing existence of Nigeria as one country. Between 1984 and 1999, four military regimes ruled Nigeria, each led by a Muslim general from the northern part of the country.¹¹ Apart from the overwhelming sentiment against continuing military rule, there was also a national consensus articulated in the public discourse of “power shift” from the northern/Muslim hegemony represented by the military regimes of the four Muslim generals to southern/Christian political leadership that heralded Nigeria’s return to democracy in 1999. Abiding by the national consensus for the power shift, northern Muslim politicians decided not to present a candidate in the presidential elections; instead, they supported the candidacy of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. Thus for the second time, the politics of ethno-religious balancing enabled Nigeria to overcome a severe crisis.

As democratic space opened in Nigeria, the need for ethno-religious and regional balancing became more salient. Both northerners and southerners as well as Muslims and Christians were assured that neither would be excluded from political power for an extended period, whatever the outcome of any single election. This is a compromise on abstract democratic principles that require equal opportunity for all citizens to vote and any citizen to run for office. The compromise, however, ensures that neither group will feel chronically excluded politically. It therefore keeps the competing regional and ethno-religious constituencies loyal to the democratic paradigm because each group knows their turn will eventually come around. It is also the reason for the strong opposition from northern/Muslim politicians against President Goodluck Jonathan’s candidacy in the 2015 elections, because many argued that the north had not served out its full turn.¹²

There are no statistics to assess the attitude of ordinary Nigerians toward the politics of ethno-religious balancing, although the principle is an integral part of elite bargaining and

11. They were (1) Major General Muhammadu Buhari from December 31, 1983, to August 27, 1985; (2) General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida from August 27, 1985, to August 26, 1993; (3) General Sani Abacha from November 17, 1993, to June 8, 1998; and (4) General Abdusalami Abubakar from June 8, 1998, to May 29, 1999.

12. Under the then ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP) version of the politics of ethno-religious balancing, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan (a Christian and Ijaw from the South-South geopolitical zone) was elected as vice president to the late president Umar Yar’adua (a Muslim and Hausa-Fulani from the northwest) in 2007. This was after President Olusegun Obasanjo (a Christian and Yoruba from the southwest) and Vice President Atiku Abubakar (a Muslim and Hausa-Fulani from the northeast) completed two terms in office. When President Yar’adua died before completing his first term in office, Jonathan completed Yar’adua’s first term and won an additional term in 2011 despite opposition from a number of Muslim northern politicians within the PDP, who believed that President Yar’adua’s successor should be a northern Muslim. These politicians were even more adamant that the party should field a northern Muslim candidate for the presidency in 2015. When they failed to overcome President Goodluck Jonathan’s incumbency advantage, they left the PDP en masse.

consensus. Still, it seems clear that there is a widespread acceptance that fair and even-handed distribution of power and resources could foster a national sense of belonging and political stability. Conversely, failure to adhere to the political convention of ethno-religious balancing leads to political marginalization that could bring instability to Nigeria, including the many cases of religious/ethnic violence that have claimed thousands of lives and destroyed property worth several billions of dollars.

Religious Leaders and Their Followers

Economic deprivation has played a critical role in the dynamic of demand and supply between religious leaders and their followers. In the 1980s and 1990s, economic and political reforms dictated by International Monetary Fund (IMF)/World Bank structural adjustment programs led to a surge of vibrant religious activism among the leaders and followers of Christianity and Islam. Economic liberalization entailed privatization and commercialization of state economic enterprises, often accompanied by mass retrenchment of workers, as well as significant reduction in public spending on critical sectors such as education and health. The working and middle classes negatively impacted by structural adjustment found solace in new religious movements.¹³ This trend accelerated following the return to democracy, particularly after the withdrawal of state monopoly control over radio and television broadcasting, and the introduction of the Internet and wireless phone communication in the early 2000s. These developments created many opportunities for religious activism, as well as affordable technologies for mass recruitment of followers. Entrepreneurial leaders were able to reach much larger audiences, popularizing the messages of their new religious movements.

Today, as disaffected masses increasingly look for miraculous intervention to ease their impoverished conditions, more and more religious entrepreneurs seek opportunities to attract followers by offering what they are yearning for. In his brief but insightful essay on the phenomenal growth of charismatic churches across Africa, Paul Gifford highlights their significant differences from the older churches in terms of the overwhelming emphasis on material success.¹⁴ He notes, “One of the most prominent of these new churches is the Nigerian multinational Winners’ Chapel, founded in Lagos in 1983; by 2000 it had 400 branches in Nigeria and was active in 38 African countries.” According to Gifford, the constant theme of sermons in these churches is that “Christianity is about plenty, victory, success.” Members of the churches are reminded that as children of God, “your Father in

13. For example, see Ogoh Alubo, “The Changing Forms of Christianity Movement and Its Roles in Democratic Governance in Nigeria,” in *Profiles of Selected Churches in Nigeria*, ed. Ogoh Alubo (Abuja: Center for Democracy and Development, 2008), 14–20. Also see Ibrahim Mu’azzam and Jibrin Ibrahim, “Religious Identity in the Context of Structural Adjustment in Nigeria,” in *Identity Transformation and Identity Politics under Structural Adjustment in Nigeria*, ed. Attahiru Jega (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet and Centre for Research and Documentation, 2000), 62–85; and Kate Meagher, “Trading on Faith: Religious Movements and Informal Economic Governance in Nigeria,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 47, no. 3 (September 2009): 397–423.

14. Paul Gifford, “Persistence and Change in Contemporary African Religion,” *Social Compass* 51 (June 2004): 169–176.

heaven wants you to have all the wealth you could possibly get.”¹⁵ In the “deliverance theology” of these churches, “success is to be experienced in every area of life, but it primarily relates to financial or material matters,”¹⁶ “abundant wealth,” and “new cars, luxury cars.” Furthermore, Gifford notes that the sermons emphasize that “wealth and success are still considered the right of the Christian, but now these blessings were proclaimed to have been blocked by demonic influence. Remove this blockage and the success and wealth naturally ensue.”¹⁷ There are two related instruments to remove the demonic obstacle to prosperity. Initially prayer camps were organized in which extensive questionnaires helped diagnose the evil forces that must be exorcised to enable individuals to achieve their God-given prosperity. Beginning in the late 1990s, prayer was replaced by an “anointed man of God” who could release the evil blockage. According to Gifford, the anointed man of God works differently:

He did not need a questionnaire. He often did not require you to tell him your problem; both the problem and the remedy are either evident to him because of his gifts, or are revealed to him. In the past few years this anointed man of God, or prophet, has become the standard means of deliverance. Often before the suppliant speaks (often before one knows one is a suppliant), the prophet can tell what is the spiritual cause of “stagnation,” and can affect the deliverance right there.¹⁸

The shift from prayer to prophetic gift as the instrument of realizing God-given prosperity is a clear pointer to the dynamic of demand and supply. The supply side can be seen in the anointed man of God providing the miraculous intervention that enables followers to achieve prosperity, thereby attracting more and more followers. The earlier reliance on questionnaires to ascertain the needs of the followers indicates the demand side that led to the more expeditious supply of the miraculous intervention needed to realize God-given prosperity. Given this dynamic, it is not easy to determine whether the religious leaders are inspiring their followers or merely catering to their demands.

Regardless of whether demand or supply is the driving force, there are important religious, social, and political consequences from the steady rise of the Pentecostal churches. According to Rosalind Hackett, the religious tolerance that has historically been a defining feature of African societies is being challenged by “emerging patterns of conflict in several African states over newer religious formations.” More specifically, Hackett attributes the rise in religious tensions to “the new challenges from increasing religious pluralization and state management of this plurality; a marked increase in religious revivalism and militancy, notably among Christians and Muslims; the growing tendency to frame socio-political insecurities and economic failures in terms of encroaching satanic and occult forces.” Hackett sees these challenges in the context of “the emergence of an

15. Ibid., 171.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., 172.

18. Ibid., 172–173.

increasingly mediated public sphere and new religious publics.”¹⁹ In the Nigerian context, Ruth Marshall demonstrates how these new religious publics have been significantly transformed from their earlier emphasis on “a doctrine of radical antimaterialism, extremely purist ethics, and a withdrawal not only from dominant forms of popular culture, but an attempt to achieve both institutional and moral autonomy from the state.”²⁰ From the perspective of this purist doctrine, “participation in politics was considered ‘un-Christian,’ and ambitions for political power . . . were shunned.”²¹ The phenomenal growth of the Pentecostal movement led to “developing stronger international ties, and entering into competition for clients.” Consequently, the social base of the movement changed from the earlier “adherents from the socially dominated groups of urban poor and youth, becoming more and more associated with leading businessmen, professionals, military men, and politicians.” These changes paved the way for “the invading army of Pentecostals into politics.”²²

In a similar tracing of this significant transformation, Ebenezer Obadare emphasizes the critical role of a “theocratic class” comprising born again Christians who served as powerful ministers in President Olusegun Obasanjo’s cabinet, effectively creating the strong impression of a “Pentecostal Presidency.”²³ The pattern continued and intensified under President Goodluck Jonathan, with the head of the Christian Association of Nigeria described as one of the 15 most influential figures in the Jonathan presidency.²⁴ The economic power and political clout of certain Pentecostal leaders have increasingly become a bone of contention with the religious leaders of the old churches, as well as with Muslims of northern Nigeria who are “seen as constituting the significant discursive ‘Other’ with which the predominantly Christian geopolitical south has historically been in contention.”²⁵ Obadare contends that since Nigeria’s return to democracy in 1999, “the ‘Pentecostalization’ of governance has raised the stakes as far as the struggle to define the Nigerian public sphere is concerned, further politicizing religion.”²⁶

Some commentators see the reintroduction of shari’a criminal law in the 12 northern states with Muslim majorities as a reaction to the steady rise of the political influence of the Pentecostal movement, or alternatively as a Muslim conspiracy to make Nigeria

19. Rosalind I. J. Hackett “Prophets, ‘False Prophets,’ and the African State: Emergent Issues of Religious Freedom and Conflict,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 4, no. 2 (April 2001): 187–212. Also see Rosalind I. J. Hackett, “Charismatic/Pentecostal Appropriation of Media Technologies in Nigeria and Ghana,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, fasc. 3 (August 1998): 258–277.

20. Ruth Marshall, “‘God Is Not a Democrat’: Pentecostalism and Democratisation in Nigeria,” in *The Christian Churches and the Democratisation of Africa*, ed. Paul Gifford (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 253.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, 252.

23. Ebenezer Obadare, “Pentecostal Presidency? The Lagos-Ibadan ‘Theocratic’ Class and the Muslim ‘Other,’” *Review of African Political Economy* 33, issue 110 (2006): 665–678.

24. See front page story, Muideen Olaniyi et al., “2015: 15 Power Brokers in Aso Rock,” *Daily Trust*, November 16, 2014, <http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/sunday/index.php/top-stories/18768-2015-15-power-brokers-in-aso-rock>.

25. Obadare, “Pentecostal Presidency?”

26. *Ibid.*

ungovernable under a Christian president.²⁷ In fact, Philip Ostien's detailed empirical study of the reintroduction of shari'a criminal law reveals that no more than three state governors (Ahmed Sani of Zamfara state, 1990–2007; Ibrahim Kure of Niger state, 1999–2007; and Ibrahim Shekarau of Kano state, 2003–2011) were serious about implementing the new shari'a codes.²⁸ The governors of the other nine shari'a-implementing states were lukewarm about it, with some of them only appearing to support the implementation of the new shari'a codes after they were accosted by angry mobs. There was mass support for the new shari'a codes based on the popular belief that the new shari'a codes would fulfill popular aspirations for the rule of law as the effective way to reduce rampant corruption. In the particular case of the city of Kano, Conerly Casey shows that “the implementation of Sharia criminal codes appealed to Muslims from all sectors of society, as a democratic alternative to, and strong critique of, colonialism and the elitism and corruption of federal and state politicians.”²⁹ These aspirations have since been cruelly dashed by the halfhearted implementation of the shari'a in virtually all 12 states.

It is a profound misunderstanding to consider the reintroduction of shari'a criminal law as the calculated political strategy of Muslim political elites to regain their lost hegemony in Nigerian politics. Rather, the massive popular support that compelled many reluctant governors and state legislators to hurriedly and halfheartedly adopt the new shari'a codes was the outcome of a series of changes in the Muslim communities of northern Nigeria that have been building up since the 1970s. These changes include massive expansion of modern education and a similarly massive transformation of Islamic education, phenomenal population growth and rapid urbanization, and far-reaching economic changes set in motion by the oil boom of the 1970s. Happening concurrently with these changes was the rise of Islamic revivalism in northern Nigeria, including the emergence of the popularized Wahhabi/Salafi movement known as Izala. The global rise of Islamic revival, especially after the Iranian revolution of 1979, had its local manifestations among the Muslims of northern Nigeria. Islamic revival, in tandem with the other concurrent changes, was bound to have political ramifications.³⁰ Prominent among these political ramifications was the earlier demand for the inclusion of a federal shari'a court of appeal in Nigeria's constitution of 1979, and the popular support for the new shari'a codes of 1999–2000.³¹ The Maitatsine uprisings of the early 1980s—deadly clashes between security forces and followers of radical Islamic cleric Mohammed Marwa—and the current Boko

27. R. T. Akinyele, “Ethnic Militancy and National Stability in Nigeria: A Case Study of the Ododua People's Congress,” *African Affairs* 100, no. 401 (October 2001): 623–640.

28. Philip Ostien, ed., *Sharia Implementation in Northern Nigeria, 1999–2006: A Sourcebook*, 5 vols. (Ibadan: Spectrum House, 2007), especially chapter 2 of volume II.

29. Conerly Casey, “‘Marginal Muslims’: Politics and the Perceptual Bounds of Islamic Authenticity in Northern Nigeria,” *Africa Today* 54, no. 3 (Spring 2008): 67–92.

30. The literature on these themes is quite large. Samples include Roman Loimeier, *Islamic Reform and Political Change in Northern Nigeria* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997); Ousmane Kane, *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria: A Study of the Society for the Removal of Innovation and Reinstatement of Tradition* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003); Muhammad S. Umar, “Education and Islamic Trends in Northern Nigeria: 1970–1990s,” *Africa Today* 48, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 127–150; and Muhammad S. Umar, “Profiles of New Islamic Schools in Northern Nigeria,” *Maghreb Review* 28, nos. 1–2 (2003): 146–169.

31. For comprehensive analysis of the politics of Muslims' recurrent demands for the shari'a, see Ostien, *Sharia Implementation in Northern Nigeria*.

Haram insurgency are also part of those political ramifications, leading some commentators to see the latter as a continuation of the former.³²

There are important political linkages between the rise of both Islamic revivalism and the Pentecostal movement in Nigeria. For example, Ebenezer Obadare observes that a “charismatic Islam” has emerged as a result of the interactive effects with the charismatic churches. He argues that the Nigerian national context in which “the state is disconnected from ordinary people’s lives” can easily lead to prayer becoming “a central element in the rearrangement of personal and inter-personal regimes, and in the composition of ordinary people’s selfhood.”³³ Obadare also notes that in “ecologies where both [Christianity and Islam] remain socially, economically, politically, and ideologically competitive,” the boundaries separating the two religions are shifting. The shift has led to “new forms of Islamic prayer whose modalities such as all-night prayer sessions, Sunday Services, personal testimonies, and a new emphasis on good and evil bear a striking resemblance to those of Pentecostal Christians.”³⁴ In the opposite direction, Obadare observes that the Pentecostal Christians are also “engaging in new approaches to prayer and uses of religious space that reveal the influence of Islamic practices.” These reciprocal influences should not be surprising, given the proliferation of new religious actors and movements in the same competitive context of contemporary Nigeria, first driven by the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s, and intensified after the return of democracy since 1999. It is not far-fetched to see the politics of ethno-religious balancing at work in the emergence of both charismatic Christianity and Islam in contemporary Nigeria.

A similar reciprocal influence is also discernible in the style of leadership and organizational format. Leadership on religious matters among Muslim communities in Nigeria has been historically in the hands of religious scholars, called *ulama*, who officiate in the observance of Muslim rites and ceremonies. The *ulama* have also been the competent authorities to speak theologically on matters of Islamic faith and ritual. Although the *ulama* were historically part of the ruling political elites, serving as judges of Islamic law and advisers and councilors to political leaders within the Muslim polities in the precolonial era, leadership in nonreligious matters was the preserve of royal and aristocratic elites. In contrast, leadership on religious matters among the Christian communities of Nigeria has been in the hands of church pastors and priests. Because there has never been a Christian theocracy in Nigeria, Christian clerics, unlike the *ulama*, have never had political counterparts. In the context of Nigeria as a modern nation-state, interactions on religious matters between the state and the two religious communities has been increasingly mediated through the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), led by pastors

32. Abimbola O. Adesoji, “Between Maitatsine and Boko Haram: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Response of the Nigerian State,” *Africa Today* 57, no. 4 (2011): 98–119; and N. D. Danjibo, “Islamic Fundamentalism and Sectarian Violence: The ‘Maitatsine’ and ‘Boko Haram’ Crises in Northern Nigeria,” *Proceedings of the 2009 IFRA Nigeria Conference in Zaria*, ed. Clément Boutillier (Ibidan: IFRA Nigeria, 2009), <http://www.ifra-nigeria.org/publications/ifra-e-papers/conferences/article/ifra-conference-on-conflict-and>.

33. Ebenezer Obadare, “Repertoires of Devotion: Prayer and the Rise of Charismatic Islam,” *Reverberations* (blog), February 26, 2013, <http://forums.ssrc.org/ndsp/2013/02/26/repertoires-of-devotion-prayer-and-the-rise-of-charismatic-islam/>.

34. Ibid.

and priests representing the various Christian denominations, and through the Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), led by the Sultan of Sokoto, who is considered the spiritual head of Nigerian Muslims. The Islamic religious scholars, who should be the counterparts of the church leaders, have been sidelined in the interactions between the state and the Muslim communities. The Sultan of Sokoto and the NSCIA that he leads do not have the same religious authority among Muslim communities as enjoyed by CAN and its leadership of pastors and priests. Nonetheless, CAN and NSCIA provide convenient platforms for the interactions between the Nigerian state and the two religious communities on an even basis that accords well with the politics of ethno-religious balancing.

Religion and Politics: The Resonant Issues in Public Affairs

The issue that engages the most consistent energy and emotion of religious actors in Nigeria has been whether or not key political positions and senior appointments in the civil service are equally shared between Muslims and Christians. Significantly, this is also the perspective from which other public policy issues are often approached, challenged, and defended. The resurgence of the Boko Haram insurgency in the summer of 2009, for example, was quickly politicized along religious lines. Although there are no reliable figures indicating the religious affiliation of the victims of the insurgency, it seems clear that more Muslims have lost their lives and property at the hands of Boko Haram, since the group operates in areas in which Muslims are a large majority of the population. Moreover, Boko Haram has killed prominent Muslim clerics and community leaders. The movement has killed Muslims praying in their mosques, just as it has killed Christians while at prayer in their churches. Yet both Muslims and Christians have expressed conspiracy theories claiming that the Boko Haram insurgency targets their respective communities. In the run-up to the 2015 elections, these narratives were particularly intense. Mujahid Asari Dokubo, a militant supporter of President Goodluck Jonathan, claimed that the Boko Haram insurgency was a Muslim conspiracy to “intimidate Christians in the North against voting for Goodluck Jonathan in the 2015 general elections.”³⁵ Conversely, Murtala Nyako, the erstwhile governor of Adamawa state, accused the government of President Jonathan with the “On-Going Full-Fledged Genocide in ‘Northern Nigeria.’”³⁶ Governor Nyako claims, “It is a well-known fact that the present Federal administration has now become a government of impunity run by an evil-minded leadership for the advancement of corruption that is

35. Victor Edozie and Port Harcourt, “Insurgency, Ploy to Disenfranchise Northern Christians—Dokubo,” *Daily Trust*, April 21, 2014, <http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/daily/index.php/news-menu/news/22128-insurgency-ploy-to-disenfranchise-northern-christians-dokubo>.

36. Murtala H. Nyako, “On On-Going Full-Fledged Genocide in ‘Northern Nigeria,’” *Global Village Extra*, April 19, 2014, <http://globalvillageextra.com/a-memo-to-the-northern-governors-forum-by-his-excellency-vadmiral-murtala-h-nyako-rtd-cfr-gcon-executive-governor-adamawa-state/>.

apparently enjoying the protection of the Federal administration.”³⁷ Muslim and Christian organizations have expressed similar views.³⁸

The preposterous conspiracy theories around Boko Haram are among the most dysfunctional manifestation of the politics of ethno-religious balancing. Yet the same politics does not prevent Muslims and Christians from finding common ground on some public policy issues. For example, Christian and Muslim leaders and organizations have repeatedly called for concerted efforts to confront the Boko Haram insurgency. The Christian Elders Forum of Northern States issued a public statement observing that the bomb that exploded in the Nyanya suburb of Abuja marked the return of Boko Haram to “our nation’s capital to inflict carnage on even more of our Nigerian brothers and sisters—Christian and Muslims—while they simply went about their day to day business.” The forum urged “the government to take whatever action is necessary, to hold nothing back, in this fight against Boko Haram.”³⁹ In similar vein, the Jama’atu Izalat al-Bid’a wa Iqamatis Sunna (JIBWIS), one of the largest Islamic organizations in Nigeria, issued a public statement urging delegates at the national conference “to focus more on issues of insecurity with a view to finding a lasting solution to the problem.”⁴⁰ Rather than appealing to religious sentiments, the statement urged delegates to “show patriotism and concern over the plight of Nigeria as a nation.”⁴¹

Apart from the grave issue of serious insecurity, Muslims and Christians have also found common ground on public policy issues, such as the law prohibiting same-sex marriage, as widely reported in the Nigerian press. It is also common for Christians and Muslims to express goodwill to each other during their respective religious festivals. As already noted, the politics of ethno-religious balancing is the dominant idiom through which Nigerian politics expresses itself both positively and negatively—a fact that becomes particularly evident during the electoral season.

A significant consequence of the politics of ethno-religious balancing is that religion has always been visible in Nigerian politics whether under military or democratic regimes. Variations are easily discernible in the intersections of religion and politics under different regimes. In the 1970s, ethno-religious balancing was more implicit and less politicized. Under military regimes, especially those of Muhammadu Buhari (1983–1985), Ibrahim Babangida (1984–1993) and Sani Abacha (1993–1998), repressive policies limited political

37. Sani Tukur, “Governor Nyako accuses Jonathan administration of genocide against Northern Nigeria,” *Premium Times*, April 19, 2014, <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/159014-governor-nyako-accuses-jonathan-administration-genocide-northern-nigeria.html#>.

38. Abbas Jimoh, “Muslim Rights Group Alleges Genocide against Fulanis,” *Daily Trust*, April 22, 2014, <http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/daily/index.php/news-menu/news/22231-muslim-rights-group-alleges-genocide-against-fulanis>.

39. Olaiya Phillips and Emmanuel D. Subilim, “Our People Are Suffering! Our Nation Is Threatened! Nigeria Must Defeat Boko Haram,” Easter message from the Christian Elders Forum of Northern States (NOSCEF), April 19, 2014, <http://olaiyaphillips.com/?p=161>.

40. Ibrahim Musa Giginyu, “Confab: JIBWIS Urges Delegates on Insecurity Issues,” *Daily Trust*, April 20, 2014, <http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/sunday/index.php/news/16683-confab-jibwis-urges-delegates-on-insecurity-issues>.

41. *Ibid.*

activity. The regimes of Muhammadu Buhari and Sani Abacha were marked by arbitrary arrests and detention of perceived opponents and critics, including religious ones. Ibrahim Babangida, by contrast, sought to co-opt religious actors, while sidelining political opponents. Religious actors have tended to be more prominent under military regimes because of the limited opportunities for nonreligious political actors. The voices of religious actors become louder in political and policy discourses, religious events attract more and more attendance, and religious organizations become more active in mediating state-society relations, including dousing tension and distributing relief materials in the aftermath of ethno-religious violence. In these contexts, some religious actors choose to play the critical role of speaking truth to power, while others find it convenient to ally themselves with the military regimes for the pursuit of selfish and sectarian interests, as well as working for the public good behind the scenes.

Under democratic regimes, political parties, labor unions, students' movements, civil society associations, and faith-based organizations are more active politically than in military regimes, thereby limiting the prominence of religious actors. However, given the abiding presence of religion in public affairs in Nigeria, politicians recognize the need to enlist the support of religious leaders, organizations, and communities as important allies for the success of their policies and programs, as well as for advancing their political careers. State authorities have recruited prominent religious leaders and organizations to support public enlightenment campaigns against the spread of HIV/AIDS, for instance. Perhaps the most prominent example is the active role of the Sultan of Sokoto in the public enlightenment campaign to overcome resistance to polio vaccination among Muslims in northern communities. Equally important, however, Christian and Muslim leaders and organizations can also vigorously oppose public policies and state actions that they deem inimical to their sectarian interests, even if the policies serve the common good.

The imperative to mobilize religious actors to support political careers is more delicate because of the real risk of alienating one religious community while appealing to the other. Yet religious leaders do have significant influence, and can even deliver the block votes of their followers. In the run-up to the 2015 national polls, outreach to religious leaders was a prominent tactic in the candidates' jockeying for electoral advantage. President Goodluck Jonathan actively sought the support of prominent leaders from the north, including traditional rulers and Muslim religious clerics. One interesting illustration of his overtures was to host Muslim clerics at the Presidential Villa, including Senator Ahmed Sani, who gained fame (or notoriety) as being the first to reintroduce shari'a criminal law in Zamfara state when he served as governor. In addition to hosting Muslim clerics at the Presidential Villa, President Jonathan also made high-profile visits to churches during the period. Opponents accused him of using religion to bolster his political fortunes. Similarly, General Muhammadu Buhari struggled to manage the religious issues that were capable of derailing his presidential ambition. By choosing a pastor as his running mate, General Buhari was able to contain the potential damage that could have resulted from the relentless attempt by the President Jonathan campaign to make General Buhari look like a Muslim fanatic who threatened the interests of Christians.

A point worth emphasizing is that the rendezvous between politicians and religious actors is not confined to presidential politics. Politicians at the state and local levels are equally cognizant of the continuing salience of religion in Nigerian politics. Depending on the religious demographics in their respective theaters of operation, Nigerian politicians have no option but to actively seek cooperation and collaboration with the relevant religious constituencies. However, there are no guarantees that courting religious leaders will always yield the desired outcome. A religious leader risks alienating his followers if he supports an unpopular candidate. When Dr. Ahmad Gumi advised both General Buhari and President Jonathan not to contest the general elections, he drew vigorous responses, including severe rebukes from Buhari loyalists.⁴² Still, the odds favor a candidate who engages in the politics of ethno-religious balancing positively in the sense of promoting even-handed access to the perquisites of power.

Assessing the Impact of Increased Religious Visibility

It is not easy to identify the impact on public affairs resulting from the increased visibility of religion in Nigerian politics. The increase has been gradual. The role of religious actors in instigating or mitigating violent conflicts between Muslims and Christians has been the subject of public debates. Conspiracy theories abound, often claiming that religious leaders are behind these conflicts, not only escalating tension through their sermons, but also securing arms and colluding with the militant youths who perpetrate atrocities.⁴³ Equally important, however, religious leaders and their organizations have been prominently active in de-escalating tension, providing refuge and relief to victims of religious violence, often without regard to religious affiliation. Religious leaders have spoken out against corruption, and urged Nigerian politicians to be more God-fearing. Yet religious leaders are often quick to complain publicly when there is a perceived imbalance in the sharing of political positions and appointments in senior civil service. On gender and women's rights issues, religious leaders have been divided. For example, while Islamist activists and conservative traditionalists are opposed to legislation for raising the age of marriage, activists for women's rights have collaborated with Muslim actors and organizations in protecting women's rights in the context of the expansion of Islamic law.⁴⁴ It seems clear

42. Dr. Ahmad Gumi is the son and successor of Sheikh Mahmud Gumi (d. 1992), the most influential Salafi leader in Nigeria. See Sheikh Ahmad Gumi, "The Second Round of Goodluck Vs Buhari: A Source of Apprehension by Dr Ahmad Gumi," *Sahara Reporters*, October 18, 2014, <http://saharareporters.com/2014/10/18/second-round-goodluck-vs-buhari-source-apprehension-dr-ahmad-gumi>; and readers' responses at "Sheikh Gumi Reacts to Critics, Warns Buhari against Contesting 2015 Presidential Election," *Sahara Reporters*, October 21, 2014, <http://saharareporters.com/2014/10/21/sheikh-gumi-reacts-critics-warns-buhari-against-contesting-2015-presidential-election>.

43. Akinyele, "Ethnic Militancy and National Stability in Nigeria."

44. Fatima L. Adamu and Oluwafunmilayo J. Para-Mallam, "The role of religion in women's campaigns for legal reform in Nigeria," *Development in Practice* 22, nos. 5/6 (August 2012): 803–818. See also Charmaine Pereira and Jibrin Ibrahim, "On the Bodies of Women: the common ground between Islam and Christianity in Nigeria," *Third World Quarterly* 31, no. 6 (2010): 921–937.

that the impact of increased visibility of religious actors on public affairs has been ambiguous.

Conclusion

Political inclusion as a strategy for unity and stability is the underlying incentive for the politics of regional and ethno-religious balancing in its constitutional articulation, bureaucratic institutionalization, and political manifestation in Nigeria. Facilitating even-handed access to power and resources is deemed necessary for bolstering loyalty to the Nigerian state, forging national identity, fostering sense of belonging, and upholding fairness in the distribution of public goods. Without empirical data, it is not easy to ascertain the success or failure of the politics of balancing in realizing these laudable aspirations. Fierce controversies have often surrounded both state action and public discourse on the principle of federal character. Still, it seems clear that Nigeria's ethnic diversity, religious differences, and political complexity require careful management. While by no means perfect, the politics of regional and ethno-religious balancing has provided a workable framework for grappling with the various challenges facing Nigeria and its pluralistic cultures and communities. Its origins and evolution since the colonial era and its widespread acceptance in contemporary Nigeria indicate that the politics of balancing is here to stay; hence, the challenge is how to make balancing work better.

Critics contend that both the principle of federal character and the politics of balancing are misguided and undemocratic. Instead of achieving the laudable aspiration of political inclusion and fairness, the principle of federal character is seen as having replacing meritocracy with mediocrity, while political balancing has allegedly entrenched divisiveness rather than fostering unity.⁴⁵ The Federal Character Commission has been criticized for imposing quotas and favoring one set of citizens against other citizens. Adamu Adamu, a prominent columnist, responds to these and other criticisms by highlighting similar policies and programs adopted by many modern states—including Brazil, the United States, India, and the United Kingdom—to manage ethnic, religious, and communal diversity, as well as redressing racial inequality, economic marginalization, and political exclusion. His analysis of the long-standing legal challenges against affirmative action in the United States suggests the need to reform Nigeria's Federal Character Commission so that it can function more effectively in addressing real and potential challenges in managing Nigeria's diversity through the principle of federal character.⁴⁶

As this chapter goes to print, more than a month after their election, senators and representatives have been unable to hold any sitting because of the rancor arising from the

45. For example, see the opinion piece by Adeolu Ademoyo, "Speaker Dogara and the False Appeal to Federal Character," *OpinionNigeria.com*, July 10, 2015, <http://www.opinionnigeria.com/speaker-dogara-and-the-false-appeal-to-federal-character-by-adeolu-ademoyo/>.

46. Adamu Adamu, "On Federal Character [I]," *Daily Trust*, July 3, 2015, <http://dailytrust.com.ng/daily/index.php/columns/friday-columns/58963-on-federal-character-i>; and Adamu Adamu, "On Federal Character [II]," *Daily Trust*, July 9, 2015, <http://dailytrust.com.ng/daily/index.php/columns/friday-columns/59559-3f>.

politics of balancing the distribution of leadership positions in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. This dysfunctional manifestation of the politics of balancing is a pointer to its grave potential to divide rather than unite. But equally important, the impasse could not be resolved by discarding the constitutional principle of federal character, nor by ignoring the imperative of regional and ethno-religious balance in the leadership of the National Assembly. Paradoxically, the politics of balancing is the source of the impasse and its resolution. Therefore, remembering the underlying aspiration for inclusion and fairness can help to navigate the challenges of using the politics of balancing in the struggle for power.

5 | Democratic Reform and Islamic Revival in the Republic of Niger

Sebastian Elischer

Overview

Over the course of the last two decades the Republic of Niger has experienced a reconfiguration of its religious landscape. Following the democratic transition of the early 1990s, Salafi and other Islamic revival groups have grown in size and influence. Today, Niger's Salafi community controls around one-fifth of the country's mosques. In contrast to its neighboring countries, peace and mutual tolerance characterize the relationship between Sufis and Salafis today. This outcome was not a foregone conclusion. While some Salafi associations developed peacefully, confining their activities to missionary and educational purposes, others provoked intra-Islamic violence in a number of locations and openly challenged the secular nature of the state. The Nigerien state has played an important role in containing political and jihadi Salafi elements. Some of the means by which the Nigerien state achieved this are difficult to reconcile with basic democratic principles. The recent attacks against Catholic churches in Niamey and the growing influence of Boko Haram in Niger show that despite the intervention of the state in the religious sphere, Niger's future remains uncertain.

Peace against All Odds: Economic Decline, Political Stagnation, and the Rise of Salafism

Since its democratic transition in 1991, the Republic of Niger has lived through five constitutions (1993, 1996, 1999, 2009, and 2010), three military coups (1996, 1999, 2010), and two large-scale Tuareg uprisings (1990–1995, 2007–2009) in its northern territory. Economically the country remains at the bottom of the United Nations Human Development Index.

Despite numerous government promises to diversify the economy, oil and uranium exports still account for the country's main export income. Currently uranium exports account for over 50 percent of all income earnings. Domestic economic activity is fragile and centers on subsistence agriculture and animal husbandry. The output of these resources is heavily dependent on rainfall. Large parts of the country suffer from extreme poverty despite enhanced debt relief support from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund through

the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative. Recurring droughts foster Niger's dependency on international aid and humanitarian assistance programs. Outside its capital of Niamey, the state lacks a visible presence and has no influence on people's lives. The world's highest fertility rate and one of the world's highest population growth rates make any socioeconomic progress hard to sustain.

Niamey's wealthy and secular francophone elite lacks empathy with its religious, illiterate, and rural population. The institutional reforms of the early 1990s have not yet translated into socioeconomic progress or the political integration of the vast majority of the country. When the delegates of the national conference in 1991 drafted guidelines for the country's first democratic constitution, the rural population was excluded from the process.¹ Niger's political order was crafted without any consideration for the vast majority of its population. Partly as a result of this, election turnout is traditionally low, and party support is heavily contingent on the mobilization of traditional leaders.² Although the post-1991 democratic environment gave birth to a new set of political leaders, Niger's political elite remained a small and well-protected circle. The contenders for Niger's presidency in 2011, for example, greatly resembled the group of contenders in 1993.³ A small number of civil society organizations have established a constituency for social, economic, and political reform, yet these voices so far are unable to transform into an effective political force. Apart from the government, there are only two groups with the ability to voice their interests effectively: the military and the trade unions of the oversized public sector.⁴

The political reforms of the early 1990s transformed Niger's religious landscape. The democratic constitution of 1993 established the principle of freedom of association and reaffirmed the principle of religious freedom. This enabled Salafi associations to enter Niger and establish a sizeable presence. In the last two decades Salafi Islam has converted new followers in all parts of the country. According to local estimates, around one-fifth of the population—which is almost completely Muslim—now adheres to the Salafi creed.

1. Susanna Wing, *Constructing Democracy in Africa: Mali in Transition* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Sebastian Elischer, *Contingent Democrats in Action: Organized Labour and Regime Change in the Republic of Niger*, GIGA Working Paper No. 231 (Hamburg: German Institute of Global and Area Studies, August 2013), http://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/system/files/publications/wp231_elischer.pdf.

2. Tidjani Alou, "La chefferie et ses transformations: de la chefferie coloniale à la chefferie postcoloniale," in *Les pouvoirs locaux au Niger*, ed. Jean-Pierre de Sardan and Tidjani Alou (Paris: Karthala, 2009), 15–36.

3. The main contenders for the presidency in 1993 were Mahamane Ousmane (CDS), Mamadou Tandja (MNSD), Mahamadou Issoufou (PNDS), and Moumouni Adamou Djermakoye (ANDP). The main contenders for the presidency in 2011 were Mahamane Ousmane (CDS), Seyni Oumarou (MNSD), Mahamadou Issoufou (PNDS), and Hama Amadou (MODEN/FA Lumana). Seyni Oumarou was the handpicked successor of Tandja, who claimed the presidency between 2000 and 2010. Hama Amadou was a high-ranking member of the MNSD between 1993 and 2007 and acted as Tandja's prime minister between 2000 and 2007. Djermakoye passed away in the 1990s.

4. Abdoulaye Souley, "Mutineries militaires en période de démocratisation," in *Armée et politique au Niger*, ed. Kimba Idrissa (Sénégal: CODESRIA, 2008), 233–254; Robert Charlick, "Labor Unions and 'Democratic Forces' in Niger," in *Trade Unions and the Coming of Democracy in Africa*, ed. Jon Kraus (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 61–82.

Niger's dire political and economic dispensation is a major driving force behind the flourishing growth of Salafism. Political and economic frustrations with the autocratic era translated into frustration with the Sufi orders. Both the semiautocratic government of Diori Hamani (1960–1974) and the military regime of General Seyni Kountché (1974–91) cultivated close personal and political ties with the Sufi orders and in particular with the Tijaniyya order. As in many West African nations Niger's Sufi leaders accepted the secular nation-state and acted as societal advisers to the government. Their privileged status enabled Sufi Islam to dominate religious life until 1991. The proximity of the Sufi orders to the autocratic elites meant that the Sufi brotherhoods entered the democratic era as discredited forces. The unfulfilled economic and political promises of the postautocratic era deepened the widespread disappointment with the secular state and its political establishment.

Salafi Islam derives from the writings of Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab,⁵ an Islamic scholar who evangelized parts of the Arab peninsula in the 18th century and who helped the House of Saud to establish the Saudi state.⁶ The Salafis' textual interpretation of the Qur'an, their support for the full implementation of the shari'a and their outright rejection of local Islamic rites⁷ as un-Islamic innovation constitute the main theological division between Sufism and Salafism.⁸ What Salafism views as sinful innovations, Sufi Muslims regard as essential cultural ingredients of their faith. An equally important distinction concerns the role of the imam. Adherents of West African Sufi Islam are organized in brotherhood congregations such as the Qadiriyyah or the Tijaniyya and follow the interpretation of the Qur'an by a religious cleric. Salafis generally condemn the idea of a middleman between God and his followers. Salafism thus challenges the influential position of Sufi clerics in African society.⁹

In Niger as in many other West African countries, Salafism derives its financial support from two main sources. Islamic welfare associations from the Arabian peninsula provide the lion's share of funds for the construction of mosques and the distribution of Salafi writings.¹⁰ Local traders and wealthy functionaries have become a second crucial constituency for the diffusion of Salafi ideas. Both face an enemy in local Islam. The Sufi traditions of gift giving to the imam and massive expenditures on marriages and baptisms militate against capital formation. Salafism, by denying a theological basis for expenditures beyond the literal Qur'anic tithe, frees successful individuals from these financial obligations.¹¹

5. Various Islamic scholars have argued that there is a theological difference between Salafism and Wahhabism. I use the terms interchangeably.

6. David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006).

7. In Africa important local rites include consulting the ancestors for advice, the celebration of the birthday of the prophet, African initiation ceremonies, and the role of Sufi saints.

8. Zidane Meriboute, *Islam's Fateful Path* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009).

9. Lansiné Kaba, *The Wahhabiyya: Islamic Reform and Politics in French West Africa* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

10. Abdoulaye Sounaye, "Doing Development the Islamic Way in Contemporary Niger," *Bulletin De l'APAD* 33, no. 1 (2011): 1–17.

11. Robert Charlick, "Niger," *African Studies Review* 47, no. 2 (2004): 97–107; Adeline Masquelier, *Women and Islamic Revival in a West African Town* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

Scholars generally distinguish three strands of Salafism: purists (or quietists), political activists, and jihadists. Purists engage in missionary and educational activities; they refuse to become entangled in politics and refrain from violence. Political activists engage in the political process by forming political parties or by openly supporting an already existing party. Jihadi Salafists wish to create a religious state by violent means.¹²

In Niger the purist branch has emerged as the dominant strain of Salafism. Today, leading Nigerien clerics from both sides of the Salafi–Sufi divide agree that their relationship is generally harmonious.¹³ Every December Salafi and Sufi clerics celebrate Christmas with the country’s very small Catholic minority in the Catholic cathedral in Niamey.¹⁴ On television and on local radio stations, representatives of both traditions lead joint prayer sessions. Across Niger’s densely populated southern region, Salafi and Sufi clerics regularly come together and engage in an intra-Islamic dialogue, thereby exchanging information about potential local sources of conflict.¹⁵ The relationship between various Salafi associations and the secular state is ambivalent. Niger’s Salafi community campaigned for the abolition of the secular state on several occasions.¹⁶ However, Niger’s Salafi associations neither support nor lobby any existing party nor did they form an Islamic party.¹⁷ Terrorist attacks and kidnappings of Western nationals have occurred on several occasions. In the first half of 2013 terrorists managed to attack a military base and a uranium facility in the north of the country. Foreign nationals have also been kidnapped while in Niger. Yet, these terrorist activities were conducted by al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), a transnational terrorist group. Domestic jihadi groups have not formed in Niger.

The evolution of the relationship between Niger’s Salafi associations, its Sufi orders, and the secular state did not always point toward a peaceful outcome. In November 2000, Niger experienced religious riots in several southern cities in anticipation of a West African fashion festival. The riots caused the destruction of private property in several cities. The political history of Niger’s immediate neighborhood has shown that the ascendancy of initially peaceful Islamic revivalist groups ultimately has the potential to produce jihadi violence. The most prominent examples include AQIM in Algeria,¹⁸ Boko Haram in

12. Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 1 (2006): 207–39.

13. Interviews with various Salafi and Sufi clerics in Niamey and Kiota, July–August 2013.

14. Many private Nigerien newspapers cover the annual event.

15. Moulaye Hassane, “La situation au Sahel et le risque d’instrumentalisation du fait religieux: Quelles perspectives pour le dialogue?,” presented at the Conférence internationale pour le dialogue des cultures et des religions, Fès, Morocco, 2013.

16. Abdoulaye Sounaye, *Muslim Critics of Secularism: Ulama and Democratization in Niger* (Saarbrücken, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010); Abdoulaye Sounaye, “Instrumentalizing the Qur’an in Niger’s Public Life,” *Journal for Islamic Studies* 27, no. 1 (2007): 211–239.

17. Abdourahmane Idrissa, “The Invention of Order: Republican Codes and Islamic Law in Niger” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 2009).

18. Louisa Ait-Hamadouche and Yahia Zoubir, “The Fate of Political Islam in Algeria,” in *The Maghreb in the New Century: Identity, Religion, and Politics*, ed. Bruce Maddy-Weitzman and Daniel Zisenwine (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007).

Nigeria,¹⁹ and Ansar-Dine in Mali.²⁰ Although these groups emerged in reaction to diverse historical and political settings, they all share some adherence to the Salafi doctrine. Niger's vulnerability to outside religious forces in combination with its close proximity to Nigeria in the south, Mali in the west, and Algeria in the north led many to fear that jihadi Salafism eventually would also come to haunt the regime in Niamey. The following sections will try to account for why this has not occurred. The focus is on the role of the Nigerien state in containing political and violent interpretation of the Salafi doctrine.

Independence, the Military Coup of 1974, and the Establishment of Religious Oversight

During the colonial era, Sufi brotherhoods and several local clerics dominated Niger's political landscape. Both the French colonial administration and the first postindependent president, Hamani Diori (1960–1974), emphasized the importance of religious tolerance and the secular nature of the state. In the immediate preindependence period, Niger's faithful were not strong enough to seriously challenge government policies. Large sections of the country were still animists and there were no noteworthy centers for the study of Islam. Muslim leaders acted independently of one another.

The economic consequences of the great Sahel droughts of the late 1960s weakened the legitimacy of the Diori regime. In order to secure the continuation of his civilian authoritarian regime, Diori turned to Libya, where Colonel Muammar Qaddafi had just claimed power in a military coup. In the following years Libya emerged as Niger's most important non-Western donor.²¹ Libyan development aid was tied to Niger's participation in several cultural cooperation programs. The programs prescribed Arabic language programs in Nigerien schools, religious training programs for Nigerien clerics, the promotion of a pan-Islamic ideology, and the establishment of a Libyan radio station, Voice of Islam. The antiseccular and pan-Arabic agenda of Libyan clerics soon provoked civil unrest. Nigerien student associations and the civil service disliked Libya's growing involvement in Niger's religious sphere.

In 1972 and 1974 students and civil servants staged several strikes in protest against the perceived Arabization of the country. At the time, students and civil servants were the only groups that organized in trade unions. As a result both groups were in a powerful position to challenge the government. Their repeated strikes weakened an already illegitimate and

19. Andrea Brigaglia, "Ja'far Mahmoud Adam, Mohammed Yusuf and Al-Muntada Islamic Trust: Reflections on the Genesis of the Boko Haram Phenomenon in Nigeria," *Annual Review of Islam in Africa* 11, no. 1 (2012): 35–44.

20. Alex Thurston, "Towards an Islamic Republic of Mali?," *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 37, no. 2 (2013): 45–66.

21. René Otayek, *La politique africaine de la Libye: 1969–1985 (Les Afriques)* (Paris: Karthala, 1986).

authoritarian government. The further destabilization of the Diori government prompted the military coup of April 1974.²²

In order to protect Niger against the nascent influence of Islamist groups in Libya and elsewhere in the region, the military regime under the leadership of Seyni Kountché (1974–1987) established the Association Islamique du Niger (AIN). Its explicit purpose was to ensure that religious doctrines from the Arab world would not find their way to Niger.²³ The government filled the leadership of the AIN with imams from the most prestigious and distinguished clerical families in Niger. The AIN president, Elhaj Alfa Oumarou Ismael, is a case in point. Ismael came from a long line of marabouts from Say, Niger's spiritual center of Sufi Islam. Ismael remained in charge of the AIN until his death in 2010; since then his son has been in charge of the organization. Most members of the AIN leadership were affiliated with a Sufi order. The majority were adherents of the Tijaniyya order.²⁴ The military government was also represented in the leadership of the AIN.

Between 1974 and 1991, the AIN was Niger's sole legal Islamic association. On behalf of the Kountché government it undertook great efforts to regulate the daily practice of the Islamic faith. Imams in charge of Friday prayer had to apply to the AIN for a prayer license. In order to receive the license, clerics had to pass several tests assessing their religious expertise in order to prove that their interpretation and practice of the Qur'an was in line with the AIN doctrine of a politically passive and moderate Islam.²⁵ The AIN or the Ministry of the Interior could revoke prayer licenses at any time. Both the AIN and the Ministry of the Interior kept records of Nigerien scholars who had received a scholarship for the study of Islamic studies in the Middle East. They also kept track of students who returned to Niger to become clerics.²⁶ Often, returning clerics were co-opted into the growing administrative machinery of the state where they enjoyed a privileged life as career civil servants. Through co-optation the government avoided their marginalization; in other countries such as Chad the exclusion of foreign-trained clerics from public service led to their politicization.²⁷

Over the course of a few years, the AIN established a dense network of local offices around the country. By the early 1980s the AIN had penetrated the vast Nigerien hinterland including the Tuareg areas in the north.²⁸ The rapid spread of a network of AIN offices was achieved by the incorporation of the AIN into the new administrative structure of the

22. Edmond Jouve, "Du Niger de Diori Hamani au gouvernement des militaires (1974–1977)," *Revue Française d'études politiques africaines* 13, no. 149 (1978): 19–44.

23. Interview with the national committee of the Association Islamique du Niger (AIN) in Niamey, July 2013.

24. Several interviews with Moulaye Hassane in Niamey, July 2013. Hassane is a professor of Islamic studies and author of several publications on Islam in Niger.

25. Interview with the national committee of the AIN in Niamey, July 2013.

26. Moulaye Hassane, Marthe Diarra, and Oumarou Makama, *Etudes sur les pratiques de l'islam au Niger* (Niamey: République du Niger, 2006), 195–200, http://liportal.giz.de/fileadmin/user_upload/oeffentlich/Niger/40_gesellschaft/islamrapportprovisoire24avril2006concorde.pdf.

27. Jean-Louis Triaud, "L'Islam et l'Etat en République Du Niger (Deuxieme Partie)," *Le Mois En Afrique: Revue Française D'études Politiques Africaines* 16, no. 194–195 (1980): 35–48.

28. Maïkoréma Zakari, *L'islam dans l'espace Nigérien de 1960 aux années 2000* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009).

Kountché regime, the National Development Society (NDS). Starting in March 1980 the military regime established administrative councils—so-called development councils—at the village, district, regional, departmental, and national level. Participation in these development councils was determined by decree and only open to a number of groups and associations, which were Kountché core constituencies of support.²⁹ The AIN was an integral part of all levels of the NDS and had representatives in all administrative units that together made up the NDS. Its incorporation into the administrative structure of the secular state enabled the AIN to oversee and control Niger’s religious landscape.³⁰

The organizational capacity of the NDS requires some explanation. Analysts frequently characterize Niger as a country with weak state structures. The notion of Niger as a weak state is correct when it comes to the provision of public goods such as health, education, and basic administrative services provided by the government for its citizens. Yet, the autocratic Kountché government invested significant financial resources from its growing uranium income into the establishment of the NDS as it clearly saw the benefits of an administrative structure that penetrated to the village level.³¹ The NDS development councils allowed the government to monitor social and political life in order to detect any potential political opposition.³²

Taken together, the regime’s clearly formulated vision to foster a national and apolitical version of Islam, the AIN’s mandate to cultivate that version, the AIN’s organizational presence across Niger, and the strategy of the government to co-opt foreign-trained clerics while being in the position to detect and isolate those who refused to adhere to the state-sponsored version of Islam, provided a buffer against the growth of a sizable presence of Salafi and other Islamist groups.

Niger’s Democratic Transition and the Reconfiguration of Its Religious Landscape

By the early 1980s declining world market prices for uranium and the inability of the military administration to establish a viable domestic tax base triggered a serious economic crisis. The subsequent intervention by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund entailed extensive cuts in the education system and the civil service. The death of Seyni Kountché in 1987 and the lackluster performance of his successor General Ali Saibou (1987–1991) provoked mass protests by students and public-sector employees. In late 1990, the military announced its withdrawal from politics. In 1991, a national conference

29. These included the civil service, local farmer associations, and representatives of youth associations.

30. Confidential interviews with several senior civil servants and politicians who were involved in the design of the National Development Society (NDS).

31. This was all the more the case after the emergence of the Maitatsine movement in Nigeria in the early 1980s. I would like to thank Rahmane Idrissa for this insight.

32. Unfortunately very little has been written about the NDS. In retrospect most Nigeriens today have ambivalent feelings about the NDS. On one hand, it facilitated exchanges between local administrators and the rural population. On the other hand, the NDS was an instrument that facilitated autocratic survival.

debated the principles of the future political order of the country. The deliberations of the national conference paved the way for the drafting of Niger's 1993 constitution, the first democratic constitution in its history, which established the right to freely associate and to freely exercise one's religion.

The political transition of the early 1990s deprived the AIN of its status as the sole legal representative of Islam in Niger. Due to its former proximity to the Kountché regime, many Sufi clerics openly challenged the legitimacy of the AIN by forming their own religious associations. Its lack of legitimacy notwithstanding, the various post-1991 governments provided the AIN with a new role as a religious advisory body.

According to Nigerien law, any Islamic association with the intention to establish Friday prayer mosques has to apply to the Ministry of the Interior for state recognition. The application procedure requires all applicants to provide a reference from the AIN. The AIN assesses whether the intentions of the applicant are in line with the notion of an apolitical and peaceful Islam. The fact that Niger recruited its new political elites either from the civil service or from the inner circle of the Kountché regime largely account for the country's continuous adherence to these principles. Given Niger's severe financial constraints, the AIN remained the only official entity with the necessary knowledge to scrutinize the motives of prospective Islamic associations.³³ All of Niger's leading politicians and parties so far have remained loyal to the AIN and its mandate. Members of both the executive and the legislative branches remained loyal adherents of Sufi Islam and dedicated to the notion of the secular state.³⁴

In order to be approved by the AIN, the leadership of the applicant association must have received a significant part of its religious training in Niger. Over the course of the last 20 years the AIN rejected a number of associations whose leadership was entirely foreign and whose background indicated the fusion of political and religious goals. These associations had their origins in Iran, Egypt, and Pakistan.³⁵ After their application was rejected, some of these groups tried to operate illegally. The inability to establish a larger legal presence meant that they failed to generate sufficient momentum to recruit followers on a large scale. Often local chiefs, who historically enjoyed close relations with the AIN, reported these activities to the local police. In several instances foreign preachers were deported to their countries of origin.³⁶

Ten years after the democratic transition it became obvious that the joint supervision of the religious landscape by the AIN and the Ministry of the Interior was less effective than it had been under autocratic rule. Although the AIN was generally wary of granting state recognition to Salafi associations, the Ministry of the Interior did so on a number of

33. Interviews with civil servants in the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior, Niamey, July–August 2013.

34. Idrissa, "The Invention of Order."

35. Interview with the national committee of the AIN in Niamey, July 2013.

36. Interviews with representatives of the Nigerien national chieftaincy association, Niamey, July 2013. Interviews with members of the Nigerien police in Niamey, July 2013.

occasions.³⁷ State recognition was granted on the basis that these associations committed themselves to a mission statement that confined their daily operations to educational and missionary activities.

In some cases the granting of state recognition to Salafi associations proved detrimental to order and stability. The most prominent example was the Association pour la Diffusion de l'Islam au Niger (ADINI-Islam; Association for the Diffusion of Islam in Niger). The leader of ADINI-Islam, Yahaya Mohammed, received his religious training in Nigeria and was a known disciple of Sheikh Abubakar Gumi, the founder of Nigeria's Izala movement. The complete leadership of ADINI-Islam had been taught by Salafists in Nigeria. ADINI-Islam quickly managed to establish a visible presence across southern Niger and in particular in the urban areas of Maradi, Zinder, and Niamey. The emergence of ADINI-Islam and a few other Salafi associations led to religious polarization in a number of localities as preachers affiliated with ADINI-Islam portrayed Sufi practices as sinful and evil. ADINI-Islam's abusive rhetoric created pockets of Sufi-Salafi violence across Niger's southern areas and thus demonstrated the negative consequences of the loss of governmental oversight over individual mosques and preachers.³⁸ In the national media ADINI-Islam leader Yahaya Mohammed engaged in several dramatic media appearances in which he condemned various government attempts to improve the legal status of women.³⁹

Tensions between the secular government and some elements of Niger's nascent Salafi community escalated in November 2000. A variety of new Islamic associations illegally took to the streets of several cities to demonstrate against the opening of an African fashion festival. The initially peaceful protests quickly escalated into riots.⁴⁰ In Niamey, rioters damaged the UN building. In Zinder and Maradi, bars and other establishments were burned to the ground. Zinder's Catholic missionaries were incarcerated. In all cities, Islamic rioters beat women in the streets.⁴¹ The riots of November 2000 proved to be a watershed moment in the relationship between the state and Islamic associations. One decade after the introduction of a liberal political system, there were clear signs that the influx of Salafi associations and the subsequent reconfiguration of Niger's political landscape had the potential to seriously destabilize Niger's southern territory. In response to this threat the Nigerien government launched several initiatives, which aimed at containing political and jihadi Salafi activity while at the same time accommodating purist Salafi groups.

37. The AIN generally was keen on keeping the number of new associations limited to Sufi associations.

38. This was widely covered by various private Nigerien newspapers.

39. "Violence islamique au Niger," *Le Républicain*, April 8, 1998.

40. Barbara Cooper, "Anatomy of a Riot: The Social Imaginary, Single Women, and Religious Violence in Niger," *Journal of African Studies* 37, no. 2/3 (2003): 467–512.

41. The daily media covered the riots in great detail.

Containing Jihadism, Accommodating Quietism: Nigerien State Strategies toward Salafism

In the direct aftermath of the November 2000 riots, the Nigerien government under President Mamadou Tandja (2000–2010) and Prime Minister Hama Amadou (2000–2007) ordered the arrests of the leadership of ADINI-Islam. It permanently banned ADINI-Islam and eight other religious associations involved in organizing the riots.

In the following weeks and months, the government initiated a series of roundtables with representatives of all major Sufi and Salafi associations as well as representatives of the Catholic Church. The purpose of these roundtables was to engage in a dialogue about how to avoid future religious conflict. Leading government representatives such as Prime Minister Amadou attended these meetings. In 2002, a Nigerien civil society organization, SOS Civisme, institutionalized these roundtables in all major southern cities.⁴² The Nigerien government supported the initiative. Over time, the clerics who had participated in the roundtables established early warning networks, thereby enabling clerics to get in touch with one another whenever religious tensions appear to be on the rise.⁴³ Somewhat remarkably, the Catholic Church became the main organizational force behind this initiative and has kept the network alive by disseminating information to all religious associations at regular intervals.⁴⁴ One result of the network's presence has been the joint celebration of Muslim and Christian holidays. Representatives of all Salafi associations regularly attend the Christmas ceremony in the cathedral in Niamey. In early 2013, the first Nigerien national, Wilfried Agbanglanon, was ordained as a Catholic priest. Sufi and Salafi clerics both attended the event.⁴⁵

In a further step, the Nigerien government employed the security apparatus and cracked down on violent extremist elements in the southern cities. These crackdowns occurred on several occasions between 2000 and 2007. The city of Maradi in particular became a theater of regular confrontations between the Nigerien army and armed jihadi fighters. A short review of the political background of leading government figures at the time helps to account for the disproportionately tough stance taken by the Nigerien government toward suspicious Islamic elements. President Tandja had been a close confidant of Seyni Kountché and, among other positions, was his minister of the interior in the early 1980s. The same applies to Prime Minister Hama Amadou, who was Kountché's cabinet director. Already in the 1990s, the government led by General Mainassara Baré (1996–1999) had established special police units in order to monitor suspicious Islamic activity in the country's southern territory.⁴⁶ Baré has been Kountché's personal assistant for several decades. The close personal and political links between Niger's new and old elites explains

42. Interview with the national committee of SOS Civisme in Niamey, August 2013. Interview with Keita Oumarou Keita in Niamey, July 2013. Keita is now a spokesperson for the Nigerien prime minister.

43. Interviews with Catholic clergy in Niamey, July 2013.

44. Interview with the national committee of SOS Civisme, conducted in Niamey, August 2013.

45. Interviews with several members of the Nigerien Catholic clergy, Salafi Sheikh Boureima, and the leadership of SOS Civisme, all conducted in Niamey, August 2013.

46. Confidential interviews with members of the Nigerien police in Niamey, July 2013.

the proactive stance of Niamey's ruler toward radical Islam. All were united in their belief that any incursion of political or jihadi Islam on Nigerien territory ought to be avoided.

The Tandja government also strengthened the institutional capacity of Niger's Conseil Supérieur de la Communication (CSC; National Communication Council). Niger's post-1991 media laws prohibit publications or broadcasts that incite religious or ethnic discord. The CSC is a regulatory body that is entitled to sanction media outlets acting in breach of these rules. The spread of abusive Islamic rhetoric had revealed the consequences of the loss of religious oversight by the AIN; now the government provided the CSC with more manpower to identify preachers who failed to comply with media laws. Informally the government tried to strengthen the supervision of the practice of Islam by invigorating the already close links between the Ministry of the Interior, the AIN, and traditional leaders. In several parts of the country, traditional leaders and local AIN officials were asked to appraise the content of Friday prayers in Salafi mosques. The building of new mosques and the construction of Qur'anic schools became an even more cumbersome process than before. In several instances both the AIN and the Ministry of the Interior did not approve of the building of new mosques.⁴⁷

The intention of the initiatives outlined above was to avoid the escalation of Islamic tensions into large-scale violence. The escalation of religious extremism in Nigeria, whose Hausa clerics traditionally have yielded significant influence over Niger's religious sphere, and the growing politicization of Islam in Mali encouraged the Tandja government to act decisively and without any concerns about human rights violations. The lack of effective human rights advocacy groups meant that the violence inflicted on Muslim communities in the south and the heavy confinement of the practice of freedom of religion did not cause any criticism outside the small literate circles of Niamey.⁴⁸

In order to avoid the fusion of politics and Islam in the future, the government established a new religious oversight body, the Conseil Islamique du Niger (CIN; Islamic Council of Niger). By providing the CIN with the mandate to effectively take control over the authorization of individual clerics, Niger aims to return to the kind of institutional oversight of religion which characterized the Kountché era.⁴⁹

Conclusion: Sacrificing Democracy in the Interest of Security

In a number of countries of the Sahel, Islamic violence has come to dominate the headlines. In contrast to all its neighboring countries, the Republic of Niger so far has successfully contained domestic jihadi Salafism. The Nigerien state played an important role in this

47. Interviews with Islamic clerics and representatives of the national chieftaincy association, July–August 2013.

48. Interview with Ousseini Issa in Niamey, July 2013. Issa is a journalist at *Le Républicain*, Niger's leading newspaper.

49. Hassane et al., *Etudes sur les pratiques de l'Islam au Niger*.

process. During the autocratic era the government of Seyni Kountché created a state-sponsored organization, the AIN, in order to exercise firm control over its clerical community. At the same time the AIN consolidated the dominant status of Sufi Islam. The various post-1991 transition governments modified the AIN's mandate. This allowed the Ministry of the Interior to maintain a modicum of control over the religious sphere. Sporadic violence between adherents of the Salafi creed and local Sufi communities proved that the government was no longer able to maintain political and violent Islamic elements. The Islamic riots of November 2000 set in motion a number of government initiatives to restore order and religious oversight. The assertive stance of the Tandja government sent a strong signal to all Salafi groups that the politicization of Islam would not be tolerated. As the November 2000 riots were the first noteworthy incidents of Islamic agitation in the country's history, the government's immediate and strong reaction was crucial in setting the ground for future debates about the relationship between the state and society. Thus both the institutional legacy of the autocratic period and the assertiveness of the Tandja government played an equally important part in fighting violent Salafism in Niger.

The Nigerien case holds several important insights and lessons for scholars and policy-makers with an interest in Africa's changing religious landscape. First, Niger serves as a powerful reminder that even weak states are not doomed to fall prey to outside extremist influences. The case of Niger shows that some African governments do have the capacity and the political will to react against the potential threat of jihadi Islam. The Kountché government created the AIN and later merged that body into the administrative apparatus of the secular state, the National Development Society. The creation of an effective religious supervisory body in the 1970s illustrates that even a seemingly weak state like Niger has the capacity to monitor its religious landscape and to seal off its territory against the influx of fundamentalist ideologies. What distinguishes Niger from other Sahel countries such as Mali or Nigeria is the strong political will of the Kountché government to use available state resources in order to create the organizational capacity the AIN required to fulfil its mandate effectively.

Second, it must be pointed out that the creation of bodies like the AIN or the CIN, as well as the Nigerien state's approach toward Islamic revivalist groups, is somewhat at odds with basic democratic principles. The AIN was embedded in an administrative structure, which was created in order to supervise the political landscape as a whole and to provide information on individuals and groups with the potential to develop into an effective opposition. State-led religious supervision generally is hard to reconcile with the principles of freedom of association and freedom of religion. As a result Sufism and local clerics associated with the AIN lost credibility in the eyes of their followers.

The aggressive stance of the Tandja regime toward the Salafi communities in the south poses serious questions about the proportionality of sustained military action against allegedly radical elements. There is little official information about Tandja's military crackdown on allegedly violent Salafi elements in the south. Local human rights agencies have criticized the government's heavy-handed approach and argued that many of the

alleged jihadists who were targeted were in fact supporters of the Tandja opposition. Neither the AIN nor Tandja are known for their democratic credentials. Some local analysts claim that the government's tough stance will do little to fight religious radicalism in the long run. Instead, it has radicalized Niger's marginalized urban youth and might one day come back to haunt the country.

The Nigerien case thus vividly demonstrates the quagmire domestic and international policymakers confront when dealing with fundamentalist versions of Islam: How can potentially extremist elements be contained by democratic means? Unfortunately, Niger does not offer any viable solutions. In recent years, Niger has emerged as a firm ally in the war against terrorism in the Sahel. Western powers, and in particular the United States, should not mistake the stability and peace that characterizes the country's intra-Islamic relations as the work of an inclusive or participatory government.

Third, the extensive analysis of the containment of jihadi fundamentalist Islam should not obscure the fact that quietist Salafi associations have become an integral part of Nigerien society. Women's associations in particular lament this fact as Salafi associations are strong critics of the principle of gender equality. Evidence from numerous other countries also suggests that even purist Salafis have the potential to turn into a serious security risk. Today this does not appear to be the case in Niger—at least not with regard to the vast majority of Salafi adherents. Numerous Salafi associations coexist peacefully with the dominant Sufi orders without ever having resorted to violence. Several Salafi associations have helped create a more diverse and tolerant Islamic society.

These examples show that the emergence of Salafism does not inevitably lead to destruction and violence. This has two important implications. On one hand, the government of Niger and its Western allies need to recognize the potential of these groups to become allies in the fight against religious extremism. While the Nigerien government has tolerated these groups and accommodated them into the political decision-making process,⁵⁰ international policymakers need to recognize and harness their potentially positive contribution to peace across the Sahel. Imbued with a rich history that spans several centuries, the Salafi creed has succeeded in establishing a permanent presence in several African countries.

On the other hand, even purist Salafi communities constitute a potential security risk for Western strategists due to their rejection of Western society and its basic convictions. The current relationship between the secular state and Niger's Salafi communities appears to be stable but there is little guarantee that this will remain the case. Even in countries where institutions like the AIN or CIN have been in place for a long time and where political elites are similarly determined to fight potentially violent ideologies, fundamentalist Islamic communities time and time again have posed a threat to peace and security. Niger's Salafi communities will continue to constitute a challenge for the Nigerien state for decades to come. In the short run, ongoing turmoil in neighboring Libya, Mali, and Nigeria have

50. A number of Salafi clerics currently advise the Nigerien government on religious affairs.

the potential to destabilize Niger. Boko Haram has long been operating within Niger's territory. Nigeria's military campaign in northeastern Nigeria has driven thousands of refugees into Niger, among them many sympathizers of Boko Haram. In January 2015, Niger experienced violent religious riots, which targeted over 70 Catholic churches across the country. These events stand in stark contrast to the generally harmonious relations between the Catholic minority and the Muslim majority. The riots occurred in response to the participation of the Nigerien government in the Charlie Hebdo solidarity marches in Paris. Interestingly, local Salafi and Sufi clerics had called on their followers not to participate in the protest marches against the government. This leaves room for speculation about the extent to which Boko Haram is already influencing Niger's Islamic faithful.⁵¹

Thus the future destabilization of Niger cannot be ruled out. Destabilization might occur through an influx of a greater number of radical preachers in combination with larger amounts of weapons and jihadi fighters. Destabilization might also occur once the life span of Niger's current political elite comes to an end. Since 1991, Nigerien politics has been dominated by the same set of leaders. None of Niger's leading politicians has ever shown any affinity with Islamist groups. Over the course of the next decade this elite is likely to retire. Little to nothing is known about the individuals who will likely replace them.

Niger's future trajectory is uncertain and its success in containing religious extremism will largely depend on four factors. First, the successful establishment of the CIN and the willingness of the government to provide it with the financial means to fulfil its mandate effectively. Second, the further peaceful integration of purist Salafism into the social fabric of Nigerien society. Third, a renewal of Niger's current political elite with politicians who are as dedicated to the secular state as the current incumbents in Niamey. Finally, the future of political stability in Niger is inevitably linked to the political trajectory of its neighboring countries.

51. All information about the 2015 riots is taken from the local media.

6 | Evolving Attitudes toward Secularism in Tanzania

*Richard Downie*¹

Overview

Tanzania is a nominally secular state, with a constitution that envisages minimal overlap between the practice of religion and politics. Julius Nyerere, who led Tanganyika to independence, oversaw its union with Zanzibar, and presided over newly founded Tanzania's first two decades as a nation, was convinced that successful state-building depended upon forging a strong sense of national identity. His chosen symbols for promoting unity included the Swahili language and the socialist ideology of ujamaa. Anything that could divide people was to be kept out of political life. Religion fell firmly into this category. Tanzanians largely accepted this edict—although they have interpreted it in different ways—and Tanzania has retained a secular system of government to this day. As citizens engaged in a national debate on a new constitution during 2013–2014, few challenged the notion that it should stay this way.

In reality, however, there has never been a neat separation of “church” and state, and religious actors have always assumed a role for themselves in public life. As time has passed, they have become more assertive in claiming greater freedom to participate in politics and policy debate. The degree of attachment to secularism tends to align with religious affiliation and is colored by the views held by Christians and Muslims of their respective places in society. Christians are more supportive of the idea of secularism, which perpetuates a system that gives them an inbuilt advantage in terms of education, economic power, and political influence (according to Muslims, at least). Among Muslims there is little agreement on the role their faith should play in political life. There is, however, a general consensus that they suffer from second-class status in Tanzania and a suspicion that secularism is a fraudulent device to exclude them from politics, while Christians are tacitly encouraged to play an active part.

1. This chapter is based on fieldwork conducted on mainland Tanzania during the summer of 2013. The research team conducted interviews and held focus group discussions in Dar es Salaam and Tanga. Their interviewees included religious leaders, current and former politicians, local community leaders, academics, members of faith-based organizations (FBOs), young Muslims, and church congregations. The author is grateful to David Baker, Hanif Tuwa, and Abdul Rahman Salim, whose on-the-ground knowledge, intellectual contributions, and logistical assistance were invaluable before, during, and after the field visit.

Muslims respond in different ways to this state of affairs. For some, the best approach is to continue to engage the government through existing channels in the hope that positive change will come. For others, change must come from within the Muslim community itself, through self-improvement, better organization, and robust engagement in public life. For a small number, change can only come through violent confrontation with the state. The latter two positions challenge the status quo and have led to a rise in tensions at the national level, where religious competition boils down to a contest for state resources and influence. At the local level, where many communities are religiously mixed, people view these developments with concern but place more value on their generally harmonious interactions with friends, colleagues, and family members of other faiths. There remains a firm commitment to peaceful coexistence, and secularism is broadly seen as a national framework for policing religious relations with the state and setting clear boundaries for acceptable behavior.

Religious Communities in Tanzania

Tanzania is an intensely religious society. Furthermore, religiosity appears to have become more pronounced over time. According to surveys conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 93 percent of Tanzanians consider religion to be very important in their lives.² This is a particularly high figure even for Africa, the continent with the highest levels of religious affiliation. Tanzania also has a long tradition of religious tolerance. The same study found that 85 percent of people agreed that followers of other faiths were able to practice their beliefs freely and thought it was a good thing.³ Less than one-quarter of those surveyed—24 percent—thought that conflict between religious groups was a serious problem in Tanzania, as opposed to other problems like political corruption (71 percent) and unemployment (82 percent).⁴ Muslims and Christians live in mixed communities, socialize together, celebrate one another's festivals, and even marry each other, although opinions appear to be hardening against so-called mixed marriages. One Christian politician characterizes relations as follows: "At the community level relations are harmonious. As Christians, we would have a Muslim come over and slaughter our animal so that Muslims would be able to come and eat at our party."⁵

Despite the importance of personal faith to Tanzanians, there appears to be a strong sentiment against religion playing a prominent role in political life. Only 35 percent of Tanzanians agreed with the idea that it was important for political leaders to have strong religious beliefs.⁶ In all other African countries surveyed, a clear majority took the opposite view. Nyerere's strong ideological attachment to secularism appears to resonate across society. For its part, the nation's political class resists any attempt by religious groups to take a political stand, unless it serves its own interests.

2. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Tolerance and Tension*.

3. Ibid., 7.

4. Ibid., 44.

5. Interview with former Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) minister, Dar es Salaam, July 17, 2013.

6. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Tolerance and Tension*, 52.

The size of the two main religious communities in Tanzania is hotly contested. The last official figures were gathered in the census of 1967, which placed Christians at 32 percent of the population, Muslims at 30 percent, and followers of African traditional religions at 30 percent. Muslims complained that these figures understated their true numbers (indeed they comprised the largest group in the final preindependence census of 1957) but they have not had an opportunity to prove this because subsequent census exercises have not included a question about religious affiliation. Some Muslims claim this omission is part of a conspiracy to downplay their size and thereby limit their influence. The most that can be said is that the groups appear to be fairly evenly matched in size. Current estimates have ranged from a 60–40 split in favor of Christians to a slight Muslim majority. While these figures apply to Tanzania as a whole, Zanzibar is more than 98 percent Muslim.

A battle of narratives has emerged in Tanzania over the salience of religion in determining socioeconomic status, power, and influence in Tanzanian society and public life. This battle goes to the heart of the nexus between religion and the state and to a large extent sets the tone for how Christians and Muslims manage their relationships vis-à-vis the state and each other.

The official view denies the existence of discrimination on religious—or any other—grounds. It contends that the inequalities of the colonial era, in which the population was segregated along racial, religious, and regional lines, were ironed out by Nyerere's postindependence government, which forged a national identity built on socialism, respect, and equal opportunity. The observance of a strictly secular state ensured that no religious group gained preferential treatment over another.

This narrative is challenged by many Muslims, who feel that they have been consigned to the status of second-class citizens because of historic injustices, dating back to the colonial period under the Germans and then the British (in Tanganyika), and accentuated by the failure of postindependence governments to address them. They argue that education policies lie at the heart of these inequalities. Under British rule, Christian mission schools were more abundant and heavily favored by the authorities, ensuring that Christians attained consistently higher levels of education and therefore access to better jobs and positions in public life. Following independence, it is argued, the Nyerere government went back on an implicit promise to reverse this disparity and, furthermore, attempted to downplay the leading role that Muslims had played in the independence movement.

A Christian counternarrative maintains that its community cannot be blamed if Muslims did not choose to better themselves through education. It points out that Christians have been proactive in addressing the needs of the population by investing in public services the state has been unable to provide in sufficient numbers, including schools, women's groups, and health facilities. It points out that Muslims are welcome to use these services and many choose to do so.

Within Christianity, Catholics are the largest denomination in Tanzania, followed by Lutherans, Anglicans, Moravians, and Seventh Day Adventists. The Pentecostal movement

is rapidly growing, as in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. Its direct, accessible, pro-poor message and skillful absorption of popular elements of African traditional religions has won many converts, mainly from the mainline churches.

Most Tanzanian Muslims follow Sunni traditions but there is a sizable minority of Shi'a Ismailis, mostly of South Asian origin. A small number of groups influenced by Salafism seek a more purified form of Islam; they include Tablighi Jama'at and Ansar al-Sunnah. Within both Islam and Christianity, a growing fragmentation of religious identity can be seen in Tanzania, with new influences constantly reshaping forms of worship and the nature and tone of religious discourse. This is an outgrowth of global influences and the popularity of social media, satellite television, and the Internet, which has enabled entrepreneurial preachers both inside and outside the country to reach new audiences—particularly young people—more easily. Some of these individuals have helped spread extremist messages.

While religious identity is undeniably important, it remains just one of several identities—class, ethnicity, political, regional (particularly the distinction between mainland Tanganyika and Zanzibar)—claimed by Tanzanians. Perhaps the most important of all is the sense of national identity cultivated under Nyerere and cemented by the designation of Swahili as the common language. These cross-cutting identities lower the risks that inter-religious tensions will bubble over. Importantly, there are few signs that religious and political affiliations overlap to a significant extent. Furthermore, intra-religious divisions undercut the prospects that members of one faith will unify in opposition to the “other.”

A Short History of Relations between the State and Religious Groups

Since independence, the Tanzanian state has sought to manage relations between the main faiths by balancing their access to power, influence, and resources. Political positions have been shared between the communities, including the presidency, which through an informal agreement has alternated between Christians and Muslims. Religious balancing has been a largely successful but at times contentious process that has become progressively more difficult to manage over time and has left Muslims feeling increasingly aggrieved.

President Nyerere was concerned that religious cleavages could cause problems in the early years of independence and interfere with the delicate process of state-building. His solution was to champion a secular constitution that guaranteed freedom of religion but also kept religious institutions at arm's length from the state, ensuring that no single faith group exercised undue influence over political life. He urged religious leaders to rally around his socialist ujamaa agenda and play their part in providing the services needed to drive Tanzania's development. Muslims claimed that despite this message, governments led by the Tanzania African National Union (TANU) and its successor party Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) actively discouraged them from participating in public life.

Many Muslims claim that Christians have conspired with the state from the earliest years of independence to gain an advantage over them, conniving with successive governments to advance their interests while loudly denouncing Muslim attempts to play a more assertive, autonomous role in public affairs. Muslims cite several examples, including the government's refusal to allow the building of an Islamic university, funded by donors from the Middle East, that could have helped close the education gap between Muslims and Christians during the early years of independence. One of the most contentious government actions came in 1968, when it forced the closure of an independent Muslim organization, the East African Muslim Welfare Society (EAMWS), replacing it with a new organization for Muslim engagement with the state, the National Council for Muslims, known by its Swahili acronym BAKWATA. This contrasted with the policy toward Christians, who were allowed to retain independent groups such as the Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT) and Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC). The EAMWS was a regional organization dedicated to building schools and improving education for Muslims. In the government's view, however, it posed a threat to its socialist agenda because its leadership was dominated by wealthy Asian Shi'a businessmen, and its patron was the Aga Khan. To Muslims, the government's real agenda was to neutralize their voice and compel them to engage through a channel it could more easily control. The same pattern was repeated in the 1990s when the government banned another independent Muslim organization, Baraza la Uendelazaji Koran Tanzania, or BALUKTA, on the grounds that it was promoting extremism.

While Nyerere kept a tight grip on state–society relations, his departure from politics in 1985 and the move to multiparty politics seven years later led to a loosening of the controls, opening up new opportunities for religious groups to engage in public life in more political ways. Other dynamics hastened this shift. Nyerere's exit and the withering of ujamaa that followed left Tanzania with an ideological vacuum that alternative messages—including religious ones—sought to fill. The catastrophic state of the national economy by the mid-1980s led to the period of structural adjustment and a move to a liberal-style free market economy, imposed upon Tanzania by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. These policies caused grave economic hardship for many people but allowed a few to get very rich. For many of the former group, religion provided solace in this new, dog-eat-dog world. Faith-based organizations (FBOs) filled the space vacated by a government enfeebled by structural adjustment policies, playing a leading role in service delivery, particularly in education. Religious groups also found their voice in the public policy arena, developing a counternarrative to the economic liberalism of the Washington consensus by advocating for a pro-poor approach to development.

Global factors also explain the growing prominence of religious groups in public life from the mid-1980s onward. The worldwide religious revival had a major impact in Tanzania, inspiring many Christians and Muslims to assert their religious identity more forcefully. In addition, globalization opened up Tanzania, previously isolated under Nyerere, to new influences. Muslims in particular strengthened their ties to the Umma worldwide and became increasingly aware of injustices being perpetrated against fellow believers in places like Palestine, which led to greater political mobilization and in some cases radicalization.

Most dramatically, the al Qaeda–led attack on the U.S. embassy in Dar es Salaam in 1998 placed Islamic extremism on the radar for the first time and prompted the government to sign onto the U.S. Global War on Terrorism. The embassy bombing shocked and appalled the Muslim community although many were critical of their government for forging a close security relationship with the United States in its aftermath.

These religious trends posed a challenge to the hegemonic governing party, the CCM, which found it increasingly difficult to manage state–religious relations. Christian groups have become more strident and confident in engaging in policy areas the government would prefer them to stay out of, such as governance, economic management, and corruption. Relations with Muslims are tense and BAKWATA has outlived its usefulness as a forum for meaningful engagement because a majority of Muslims view it as an illegitimate organization more intent on controlling them than listening to them. Inter-religious relations are also becoming harder to manage because of a series of violent attacks on churches and clerics in Zanzibar, Arusha, and elsewhere, at least some of which have been blamed on Islamist extremists.

Furthermore, religious groups are becoming more vocal, along with the rest of civil society, in their complaints against the political class, which center on disgust at high levels of corruption and continued poor service delivery. Particular antipathy is directed at the class of politicians dubbed *mafisadi*, a Swahili-English wordplay on mafia, whose graft and conspicuous wealth accumulation is a lightning rod for public frustration. Although the CCM comfortably won the 2010 national elections, winning 62 percent of the presidential vote and 60 percent of the parliamentary vote, it was the party’s worst performance since Tanzania’s first multiparty elections in 1992. The CCM is particularly distrusted by sections of the Muslim community in Zanzibar, who accuse the party of rigging elections in 1995 and 2000 (with violent consequences) in order to prevent the opposition Civic United Front (CUF) from taking power. This trend line of eroding public trust in the CCM and the political class in general offers potential opportunities for religious groups wishing to take on a more prominent role in political life.

Intra-religious Dynamics and Their Impact on Engagement with the Secular State

Big differences can be observed in the way Christians and Muslims organize themselves in Tanzania, define their mission, and the types of issues they focus on. These differences determine how they engage with the secular state and how, in turn, they are treated by the state. The perception—among both believers and broader society—is that Christian groups are more organized and that they have invested in strategic areas of public life, notably the provision of education and health care. As a result, they are able to exercise more influence in political affairs than the Muslim community, which has been consumed by internal divisions and has historically placed less emphasis on providing services, either to fellow Muslims or Tanzanian society more broadly.

Christian denominations in Tanzania are active, well-organized, and widespread. They have set up dozens of FBOs engaged in advocacy, charitable work, and missionary activity. They are adept at articulating their interests to the government and know how to speak to—and solicit funds from—international donors, whose presence in Tanzania is ubiquitous. Christian-run schools and clinics play a particularly important role. According to government figures, 42 percent of secondary schools in Tanzania were privately run in 2003; of these, 45 percent were run by Christian organizations while only 12 percent were operated by Muslim groups.⁷ Several Christian groups organize intra-faith dialogues and provide an outlet for regular communication with the government. They include a Catholic umbrella organization, the Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC), and a Protestant body, the Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT). Unlike BAKWATA, these groups have access to the government but remain independent of it.

A noticeably different approach can be observed between the mainline churches and the newer, Pentecostal churches. The latter tend to focus on evangelism, are less hierarchical, less organized, and generally less interested in engaging with other denominations. They are also prone to internal splits. A pastor's wife at an Assemblies of God-affiliated church in a poor neighborhood of Dar es Salaam explained that her congregation had formerly stood at 900 but had been cut in half following a leadership dispute.⁸ Her story reflects the start-up nature of many Pentecostal churches, which stand or fall on the charisma of their pastors. Although the marketplace for followers and funds is highly competitive, leading a church can be a potentially lucrative enterprise for the most entrepreneurial. Intra-faith tensions within Christianity are not confined to the Pentecostal denominations. Within the Lutheran Church, a campaign to create a separate diocese in Meru, near Arusha, led to a bitter confrontation lasting three years. A similarly protracted schism within the Anglican Church has centered on the Mwanza diocese. However, none of these divisions have significantly weakened the ability of the Christian church to engage with the state on a national level.

The most interesting religious debates in Tanzania right now are occurring within the Muslim community, which is sharply divided. These debates stem from rising disquiet about their socioeconomic position as a community and the failure of the government to respond to their grievances. While the view that they have been neglected as a community is broadly shared by Muslims, there is little agreement about how to respond. The traditional, pro-establishment camp is represented by BAKWATA, which relies upon its status as the preferred partner of the government to promote Muslim interests. However, the majority of Muslims reject BAKWATA's approach as ineffective and accuse it of failing to adequately represent them. For these Muslims, BAKWATA is a means to keep them out of politics rather than include them. As a result, new groups and new thinking have emerged. They include the Supreme Council of Islamic Organizations and Institutions in Tanzania

7. Robert Leurs, Peter Tumaini-Mungu, and Abu Mvungi, *Mapping the Development Activities of Faith-Based Organizations in Tanzania*, Working Paper 58 (Birmingham, England: Religions and Development Research Program, University of Birmingham, 2011), 3, <http://epapers.bham.ac.uk/1659/1/Leurs.pdf>.

8. Interview with pastor's wife at an Assemblies of God-affiliated church in Dar es Salaam, July 18, 2013.

(Baraza Kuu), which seeks to usurp BAKWATA's role as official interface body to the government. It draws on the support of a younger, more educated wing that argues that Muslims must stop passively waiting for help and do something as a community to improve themselves. The Tanzania Association of Muslim Professionals (TAMPRO) typifies this approach by focusing on investments in education and professional skills development. These groups tend to view Islam as a way of life as well as a religion and therefore consider politics to be a legitimate arena of activity and engagement. The growing popularity of this view poses a challenge to the government's secular vision and raises the likelihood of more voting along religious lines at election time.

A final, more activist movement within Tanzanian Islam argues that direct action, confrontation, and—on the fringes—violence is the only way of getting the government to sit up and take the views of Muslims seriously. It is represented by organizations like Uamsho, or “Awakening” in Swahili, which has a large following on Zanzibar. Uamsho was originally more concerned with preaching and religious revival but has gradually moved into the realm of advocacy and—in the government's view—extremism. Its message has increasingly been wrapped into a set of political demands ranging from improved living conditions for Muslims to outright independence for Zanzibar. While the group is alleged to have dabbled in violent activities, its supporters say they have been forced into more extreme directions because of the government's refusal to engage with Muslims outside of BAKWATA. As one young Zanzibari Muslim now living in Dar es Salaam put it:

Uamsho encourages people to bring complaints to them so they can transmit them to the government but the government never considers these complaints. All they listen to are the ones relayed by the Zanzibar branch of BAKWATA. Uamsho's exclusion disturbs people so they hold rallies to get attention. That's the only way they have of getting their message across.⁹

One of the most charismatic and controversial individuals operating in this stream is Sheikh Ponda Issa Ponda, who enjoys a cult following among many young Muslims who admire his fearlessness in standing up to the state. Ponda, who was wanted by the authorities on suspicion of hate speech, was shot and injured during an altercation between his followers and the police in Morogoro, near Dar es Salaam, in August 2013.¹⁰ Ponda's activities are viewed as a threat not only by the authorities but by BAKWATA as well, who fear the violent disturbances that sometimes accompany his appearances. Violent disputes within the Muslim community are not new to Tanzania. On several occasions, radical Muslims have tried to forcibly oust BAKWATA-linked clerics from mosques in Dar es Salaam. These intra-faith divisions are a source of despair and frustration for many Muslims, who blame them for the community's failure to wield more influence in public life and win the respect of other faith groups. As one young Muslim puts it: “Islamic religious leaders are always fighting each other, and it creates a negative view of us all as a

9. Focus group discussion with young Muslims in Dar es Salaam, July 17, 2013.

10. Elisha Magolanga, “Security Tight as Ponda Admitted to Muhimbili,” *The Citizen*, August 12, 2013, <http://www.thecitizen.co.tz/News/-/1840392/1944676/-/item/0/-/124883u/-/index.html>.

community. It helps prove the point to Christians that we are troublemakers; we can't even help fighting each other."¹¹

Secularism on the Wane? Religious Influences in Tanzanian Political Life

Groups like Uamsho and individuals like Sheikh Ponda are the most visible manifestations of shifting attitudes toward secularism, whereby religious actors are more willing to engage in activities that are considered political in nature. This shift can be seen in a number of different ways. It includes some evidence of voting along religious lines; greater involvement by Muslims in politics as an effort to address long-standing grievances with the state, such as its refusal to constitutionally recognize Kadhi courts and allow Zanzibar to join the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC); and a more expansive interpretation by Christian FBOs of their role in tackling public policy issues such as corruption and natural resource management.

PARTY FORMATION AND VOTING PATTERNS

Religious parties are prohibited in Tanzania and political and religious identities do not neatly align with each other. However, religious identity is becoming a more relevant unit of political analysis. There is a common perception that the two main opposition parties—the CUF and Chadema—are parties for Muslims and Christians respectively. Undoubtedly, the CCM has an interest in making this claim in an effort to accuse its opponents of undermining the secular state and stirring up religious discord. The Catholic archbishop of Mwanza accused the CCM in 2011 of smearing the Catholic Church by suggesting it was agitating on behalf of Chadema.¹² Nevertheless, the accusation is beginning to stick. Neither Chadema nor the CUF help their case by leveling the same kinds of accusations against each other. The choice of a former Catholic priest, Willbrod Slaa, to be the presidential candidate for Chadema in 2010 was seen as divisive by some Muslims. There is nothing in the platforms of any of the major parties to suggest that they are trying to advance the interests of a specific faith group. The fairly even sizes of the Christian and Muslim communities in Tanzania would suggest there is no electoral advantage to be gained by mobilizing voters along religious lines. While Chadema received more support in majority Christian areas of the country in 2010 and comparatively little support in Muslim majority regions, the results were not significant enough to suggest the presence of religious voting blocs.¹³

However, there is some evidence that candidates at the local level have made religious appeals. Furthermore, there was controversy during the 2010 national elections campaign

11. Focus group discussion, July 17, 2013.

12. "Violence in Mto wa Mbu," *Tanzanian Affairs Faith News*, no. 99, May 1, 2011, <http://www.tzaffairs.org/2011/05/faith-news-9/>.

13. See analysis by Carl Sebastian Laurentius Gahnström, "Ethnicity, Religion, and Politics in Tanzania: The 2010 General Elections and Mwanza Region" (Master's thesis, University of Helsinki, May 2012), 141–142, <https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/34058/Gahnstrm%20final.pdf?sequence=2>.

when the Catholic Church issued a pastoral letter on civic education. Entitled “Our Proposals for National Priorities,” the document merely urged readers to make informed political choices based on candidates’ worthiness for office. However, it was viewed as a hostile intervention by leading CCM candidates, who interpreted its tough language on corruption as implicit criticism of their record in office. President-elect Jakaya Kikwete said such documents were “likely to create a scenario where Tanzanians may go to the elections to vote under directives or inspirations of their religions.”¹⁴ The issuing of a document by the Supreme Council of Islamic Organizations and Institutions in Tanzania, urging members to choose candidates who would advance the interests of Muslims, was similarly controversial.

MUSLIM PUBLIC POLICY ENGAGEMENT

For Muslims, two issues in particular have generated prolonged, sometimes bitter, discussions with the government and been used as evidence to claim unfair treatment. These are the call for the government to recognize and support Kadhi courts on the mainland and the controversy over Zanzibar’s membership in the OIC.

Kadhi courts had adjudicated personal and family law for Muslims in Tanzania during the precolonial and colonial eras but were denied official recognition in Tanganyika when legal reforms were introduced on the mainland shortly after independence in 1961. A long-running campaign for their reintroduction received an apparent boost when the CCM made an election promise to reexamine the Kadhi courts question in 2005. The announcement was interpreted by Muslims to mean that a CCM government would reintroduce the courts. (There are suspicions that the election pledge was an effort to win support from the CUF, which was seen as a more Muslim-friendly party). When the government failed to do so, BAKWATA and other organizations threatened to mobilize Muslims against the CCM in the 2010 elections. Although there is no evidence that they ultimately did so, the issue continues to rankle among Muslims. The status of Kadhi courts is one of the few policy issues to cause a split along religious lines. Muslims are unanimously in favor of reestablishing them while Christians maintain that recognizing Kadhi courts would be an unconstitutional act of religious favoritism.¹⁵

The controversy over Zanzibar’s decision to join the OIC in 1993 is an example of a constitutional issue—the right of nonsovereign entities to join international organizations—that took on religious overtones, with Muslims and Christians lining up on opposite sides of the argument. Zanzibar ultimately backed down following the intervention of former president Nyerere. However, the controversy flared up again in 2009 when the minister of foreign affairs said he could see no problem with Tanzania joining the organization. He later backtracked, following an outcry from Christian leaders who said that OIC membership was

14. Simeon Mesaki, “Religion and the State in Tanzania,” *Cross-Cultural Communication* 7, no. 2 (2011): 257.

15. For more details, see Dr. H. Majamba, “Possibility and Rationale of Establishing Kadhi Courts in Tanzania Mainland,” Paper presented at 20th REDET RMC workshop, University of Dar es Salaam, November 10, 2007.

not compatible with the country's secular constitution. Muslim support for OIC membership appears to stem from the belief that it could unlock a lucrative funding source that would help the community compete with Christians. In essence, this is another manifestation of the dynamic that drives interfaith relations in Tanzania; a competition for resources in order to increase comparative influence with the state.

One area where Muslim advocacy on public policy has achieved some recent success is education. A lobbying effort prompted the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA) to make candidates' names anonymous following accusations that people with Muslim-sounding names were being unfairly marked down. A second problem emerged when alarmingly high numbers of high school students failed their Islamic Knowledge exams in 2012. BAKWATA said NECTA was to blame and claimed that its mistakes were disproportionately affecting Muslims, who tended to take the subject in greater numbers than Christians and were being denied university places because of their poor results. A NECTA investigation concluded that administrative errors were to blame, and an apology was issued.¹⁶

CHRISTIAN PUBLIC POLICY ENGAGEMENT

Tanzania's Christian FBOs have confidently engaged with the state on public policy issues for many years. They perform a range of activities: providing services, conducting research, and managing relations with the government and other denominations and faiths. In some areas, these efforts are welcomed by the authorities. Church groups have been deeply involved in public service delivery and fill an important gap in education and public health provision. The role of the church in conflict resolution and mitigation is also acknowledged. For example, the Inter-Religious Council of Peace Tanzania, an umbrella group representing most of the mainstream Christian denominations and other leading faiths, claims to have helped negotiate the political unity agreement between the CCM and CUF in Zanzibar that ended the violent postelection crisis of 2005.

In other areas, however, the desire of Christian FBOs to engage in public policy is contested by the civil authorities. When FBOs stray into areas that make the government uneasy, such as advocacy on good governance, transparency, and natural resource management, the political class is quick to accuse them of undermining the secular nature of the state. There is particular suspicion of (the vast majority of) groups whose activities are funded by foreign donors. Norwegian Church Aid has been supporting advocacy work conducted by the CCT into the economic implications of natural gas discoveries off the coast of southern Tanzania. For the CCT, it is wholly legitimate to engage in efforts to promote sustainable development through good stewardship of the country's natural resource wealth. As a spokeswoman explained, "Our view is that we serve our people, and it's not just their spiritual well-being, it's their socioeconomic well-being that matters as well."¹⁷

16. Guardian Reporter, "NECTA Decision over Exam Results Pacifies BAKWATA," IPPMedia.com, June 9, 2012, <http://www.ippmmedia.com/frontend/index.php?l=42434>.

17. Interview with CCT members, Norwegian Church Aid, Dar es Salaam, July 17, 2013.

That view was given short shrift by a leading CCM politician and former minister, who accused FBOs of being manipulated by foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) seeking to cause “disharmony.” His message to FBOs was clear and blunt: “Stay out of politics. Why tell us how to manage our natural resource wealth? You don’t know what you’re talking about.”¹⁸

Many Christians feel that politicians are hypocritical in their approach to religion; they are quick to exploit religious connections when it suits them but jealously guard their affairs from outside intrusion by FBOs. For many Christians, the bigger problem of managing relations between church and state is not the former interfering in the latter, but the other way round. There is a deep aversion toward politicians who “play politics with religion.” Most Christians express the view that the state should guarantee freedom of religious expression, keep worshippers safe from extremists, and eschew interference in all other areas of spiritual life in favor of focusing on the key task of service delivery. As one member of an Assemblies of God congregation in Dar es Salaam succinctly put it: “I’d just like the government to provide the basics: infrastructure, water, utilities. But here I speak as a citizen, not as a Christian.”¹⁹

Inter-religious Dynamics

Inter-religious relations are generally good in Tanzania. People live in mixed communities and are accustomed to dealing with each other. But the most worrying outcome of religion’s increasing prominence in public life is that inter-religious tensions are slowly building in parts of the country. This is perceptible in the ways the two main communities view each other. The most recent Pew Survey data suggests that followers of the two main faiths in Tanzania are more distrustful of each other than their counterparts in other African countries. When asked whether they considered most or all Muslims to be hostile to their community, 43 percent of Christians answered yes. The corresponding figure for Muslim respondents was 27 percent.²⁰ Other research suggests that self-identification along religious lines is becoming more common, fostering an “us-versus-them mentality” between Christians and Muslims.²¹ These tensions provide an opening for politicians and religious extremists seeking to win support by exploiting underlying grievances. During a series of interviews conducted in mainland Tanzania in the summer of 2013, interviewees said they could detect a hardening of attitudes by believers toward those of other faiths.²² This is manifested in many different ways, from an increased willingness to challenge other people’s articles of faith and enter into confrontational debates about doctrine to the efforts of neighboring churches and mosques to drown out each other’s messages with

18. Interview with former CCM minister, Dar es Salaam, July 17, 2013.

19. Interview with member of an Assemblies of God church in Dar es Salaam, July 18, 2013.

20. Presentation by James Bell, “Islam in Africa: Faith and Society,” Presentation at CSIS, Washington, DC, March 25, 2013, 12, http://csis.org/files/attachments/130325_CSIS_GMU_Islam_in_Africa_Conference_ALL_SLIDES.pdf.

21. See, for example, the discourse analysis put forward by Thomas Ndaluka, *Religious Discourse, Social Cohesion and Conflict: Muslim-Christian Relations in Tanzania* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2012).

22. Meetings were held over a two-week period in July 2013 in Dar es Salaam and Tanga.

loudspeakers and stereo systems. During a visit to the coastal city of Tanga at the height of Ramadan, an evangelical church held an ostentatious open-air gospel concert in an effort to attract converts from the majority-Muslim local population. Into this atmosphere of heightened tension entered an international group of young evangelical missionaries. While these activities were tolerated by locals, they were nevertheless a source of irritation and frustration.

Most worrying of all are the small but significant number of violent incidents in which religious leaders and places of worship were targeted in 2012 and 2013. These included the bombing of a Catholic church in Arusha that killed three worshippers in May 2013; the shooting dead of a Catholic priest in Zanzibar in February 2013; skirmishes over religious rites to slaughter animals in the far south of the country that culminated in the murder of a pastor; a series of acid attacks on religious leaders, businessmen, and tourists; and riots in Dar es Salaam in October 2012 following accusations that a Christian boy had desecrated a copy of the Qur'an.²³ Tanzanians are quick to blame external troublemakers for these incidents even though strong evidence suggests that internal elements are largely to blame. While Saudis and Emiratis were rounded up in the immediate aftermath of the Arusha church bombing, subsequent investigations, assisted by the FBI, suggested that the perpetrators were locals.²⁴

It is very important to note that although this violence manifests itself along communal lines, religion is not necessarily the cause. Interviewees were in almost total agreement that the root cause of these incidents was socioeconomic; they reflected anger at a lack of employment opportunities and economic prospects, particularly among youth. Another important note of caution is that some of these incidents are likely to have been the result of intra-religious rivalries, rather than inter-religious hostility. However, a lack of effective communication from the government and incendiary reporting by elements of the local media leads people to jump to conclusions and blame extremists from other faith communities.

Religious communities are trying to address tensions at the national level through an interfaith dialogue run by the Inter Religious Council of Peace Tanzania (IRCPT).²⁵ While welcome, there are doubts about the effectiveness of these efforts, in particular whether the government is particularly invested in them. An inquiry announced by President Kikwete into the causes of extremism appears to have sunk without trace. Another problem is that the groups responsible for the rise in tensions are the least willing to engage in dialogue.

23. For a more comprehensive list of violent incidents, see Andre LeSage, "The Rising Terrorist Threat in Tanzania: Domestic Islamist Militancy and Regional Threats," *INSS Strategic Forum*, September 2014, <http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratforum/SF-288.pdf>.

24. See Peter Saramba, "Bodaboda Man Charged with Bombing of Church," *The Citizen*, May 13, 2013, <http://www.thecitizen.co.tz/News/Bodaboda-man-charged-with-bombing-of-church/-/1840392/1851652/-/6l1bkuhz/-/index.html>.

25. For example, the IRCPT convened a series of meetings between communities in Dar es Salaam to try to defuse tensions following the October 2012 riots. This later included a series of mediated discussions between community leaders and government representatives.

Managing Religious Relations at the Local Level: The View from Tanga

The complex dynamics between religion and politics play out on a local scale in Tanga, a largely Muslim city with a small Christian minority on the coast of Tanzania, half way between Dar es Salaam and Mombasa.

The unchallenged status of Islam as the dominant faith in Tanga means that the battle for resources and political power is fought within the Muslim community. Intra-faith divisions are easy to detect; the most obvious one is between the majority Sunni and minority Shi'a communities. These fissures are magnified by socioeconomic and ethnic divides. The Shi'a community in Tanga is wealthier and its followers are predominantly of South Asian origin. Its largest sect, the Bhora, worship at a mosque that is large, modern, and prominently located. During prayer time, the streets around the mosque are clogged with parked cars and SUVs. By contrast, the nearby Sunni mosque is older and frequented by Swahili worshippers who travel to prayers on foot, by bicycle, or by moped. Sunni Muslims express grudging admiration for the ability of the Shi'a, particularly the Ismailis, to fund public services in the town.

Intra-faith divisions extend to competition over teaching and religious doctrine. Tanga has long been a seat of Islamic learning in East Africa but there has also been a history of acrimonious conflict between rival seminaries. For decades, the main organizations for training Islamic teachers, Zaharau and the Tanganyika African Muslim Teachers' Association (TAMTA), have competed with each other for influence and students. Again, these rivalries reflect other, ethnic divisions, namely between and among the Segeju and Digo communities. Zaharau was established in 1966 following a split within TAMTA between rival Segeju clans. A third seminary, Maawa al-Islam, was set up by a Digo scholar in the mid-1970s, with the express purpose of advancing the interests of his ethnic group.²⁶ Young Muslims in Tanga express their frustration with these internecine rivalries and blame the overwhelming focus on religious—and rote—learning over secular study for poor levels of educational attainment among Muslims. “Islamic institutions are the problem,” asserts one Muslim youth. “They [the seminaries] should insist that their community gains both secular and religious knowledge.”²⁷

In terms of its interactions with the secular life of Tanga, Islam plays a prominent but delineated role. At the community level, there is a clear division of responsibilities between the secular and religious leadership but its representatives work closely together. In Mnyanjani, an isolated community on the fringes of the city, the imam of the mosque provides religious instruction at the madrasa, supervises prayers at the mosque, and offers religious advice to inhabitants. The village chairperson takes care of secular business. An elected party official at the lowest rung of the CCM hierarchy, his job is to act as a “bridge”

26. For more details, see Abdin Noor Chande, “Islam, Islamic Leadership and Community Development in Tanga, Tanzania” (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, Montreal, October 1991).

27. Focus group discussion with young Muslims, Tanga, July 20, 2013.

between the community and the government, ensuring the latter performs its functions of providing water, sanitation, and basic health services and relaying villagers' concerns up to the next level of authority.

In Mnyanjani, national level tensions over religion seem distant; they are dismissed by one elder as “political incidents that have nothing to do with religion.” In this view, “Politicians are responsible for stirring up tension; they are the source of the problem.”²⁸ At the same time, the assertion that Muslims are being short-changed in Tanzania is clearly articulated even at the community level, in a village where everyone is Muslim: “The central government is dominated by Christians,” says one man, pointing out that “educated Muslims, they complain about this issue.”²⁹

Interfaith relations in Tanga are generally good but mutual suspicion is rising due to national level tensions and some isolated local incidents. Christians in Tanga expressed concern about an alleged arson attack on a construction site where an Assemblies of God church was being built. While an investigation was launched by the local authorities, no public information was released about the incident, allowing rumors to spread and fingers to be pointed at Muslims. A leading member of Tanga's Lutheran diocese expressed frustration with the situation and said the authorities could do more to alleviate tensions: “People want the government to provide security in churches, to keep them safe. [We'd like] to have police officers there during Sunday prayers. But the local authorities say they don't have the resources.”³⁰

In the absence of official efforts to maintain strong interfaith relations, there is some evidence that Christians in Tanga are self-regulating their activities in order to avoid confrontation. During the month of Ramadan, Christians refrained from eating in public during the day to avoid causing offense. While some argued that this was a positive sign of respect, others said they had felt compelled to modify previous behavior for fear of sparking confrontation. Community leaders in Tanga raised concerns that youth in the town were becoming less tolerant and more willing to enter into arguments with people of other faiths.³¹ It was the assessment of a Lutheran church leader that “social misunderstandings between our religious communities are going to get bigger over time. People want the government to deal with it [religious intolerance] now, while it's in its early stages, to prevent bigger problems later on.”³²

Conclusion

Religious identity has become stronger over time in Tanzania, a country where faith has always been an important part of people's lives. As the political system has evolved from a

28. Discussion with village elders in Mnyanjani, Tanga, July 21, 2013.

29. Ibid.

30. Discussion with representative of Tanga's Lutheran diocese, July 20, 2013.

31. Discussion with a village elder in Mnyanjani, Tanga, July 21, 2013.

32. Discussion with representative of Tanga's Lutheran diocese, July 20, 2013.

one-party state into a multiparty structure—albeit one dominated by a single party—and Nyerere's ujamaa philosophy has begun to fade, the arena for competing ideas has greatly expanded. Religious groups have inserted themselves into this space, inspired by the global religious revival and a desire, particularly among Muslims, to challenge inequalities at home, demand better governance from their political leaders, and improve their status vis-à-vis Christians.

Different religious groups involve themselves in public affairs and politics in different ways. Christians, particularly those belonging to the mainline churches, have become accustomed to regular interactions with the state and consider themselves to exercise a degree of influence over it. Muslim organizations believe they have been locked out of meaningful interaction with the state and are considering different strategies in order to make their voices heard and increase their relative influence over Christian groups. The relationship between the Tanzanian state and its religious communities is a fluid, ever-shifting one, regardless of the fairly rigid boundaries defined by the constitution.

However, while religious actors have become more assertive in public life, a majority remain wary of straying too far into politics out of respect for Tanzania's secular foundations. Furthermore, Tanzania's politicians jealously guard their space, partly out of self-interest, and partly out of fear of the potentially destabilizing effects of religious competition on public life. These attitudes are to some extent justified by evidence of increased friction between religious groups on parts of the mainland and persistently high tensions on Zanzibar, where religious questions have become wrapped up in political demands for greater autonomy or outright independence.

For these reasons, most citizens remain at least notionally attached to the secular state in Tanzania. Yet at the same time many interpret secularism in increasingly loose terms and do not consider it a barrier to entering into political engagement and policy debate. Going forward, religious groups and actors will likely play a more prominent part in political life. A trend line of declining government performance in Tanzania exposes the state to challenges from its citizens, some of which are couched in religious terms. These challenges are particularly loud from Muslims. The state has been slow to respond to their demands and slow to wake up to the potential threat they could pose if violent extremists manage to exploit them. An upswing in violent activities from the extremist fringes of the Muslim community could in turn generate protests from Christians that the state is not doing enough to protect them. These currents may cause citizens to assert their religious identities in their public and political lives, redefining the boundaries of the secular state in the process.

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(both church and mosque are located in Uganda)

