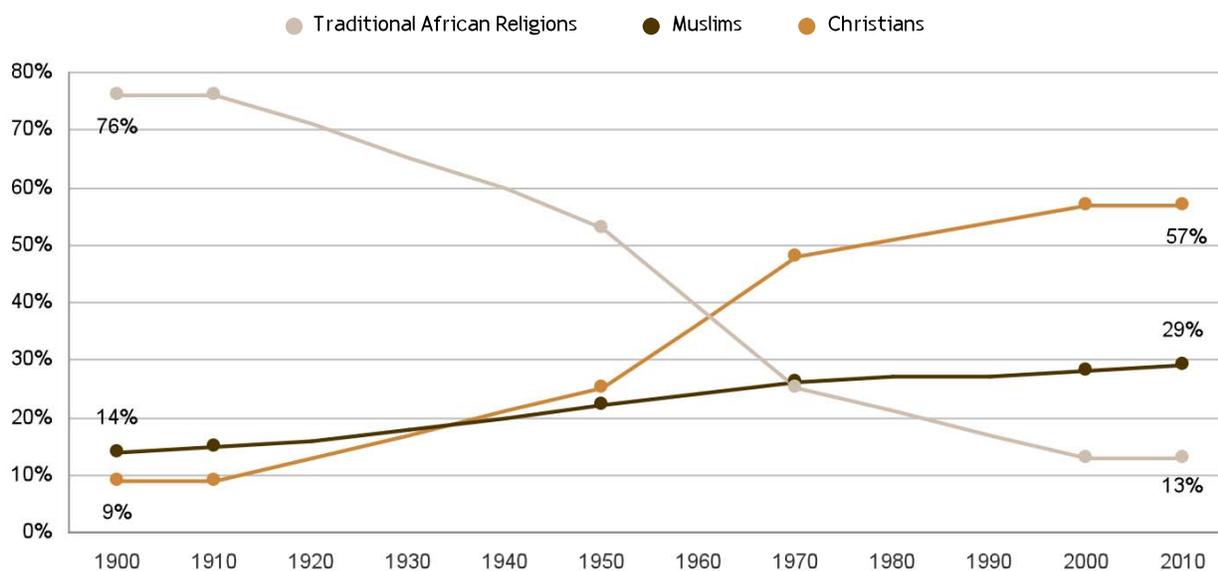


Preface

In little more than a century, the religious landscape of sub-Saharan Africa has changed dramatically. As of 1900, both Muslims and Christians were relatively small minorities in the region. The vast majority of people practiced traditional African religions, while adherents of Christianity and Islam *combined* made up less than a quarter of the population, according to historical estimates from the World Religion Database.

Since then, however, the number of Muslims living between the Sahara Desert and the Cape of Good Hope has increased more than 20-fold, rising from an estimated 11 million in 1900 to approximately 234 million in 2010. The number of Christians has grown even faster, soaring almost 70-fold from about 7 million to 470 million. Sub-Saharan Africa now is home to about one-in-five of all the Christians in the world (21%) and more than one-in-seven of the world's Muslims (15%).¹

Growth of Islam & Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa Since 1900



Source: World Religion Database. Historical data draw on government records, historical atlases and reports of religious organizations at the time. Later figures draw on U.N. population estimates, surveys and censuses.

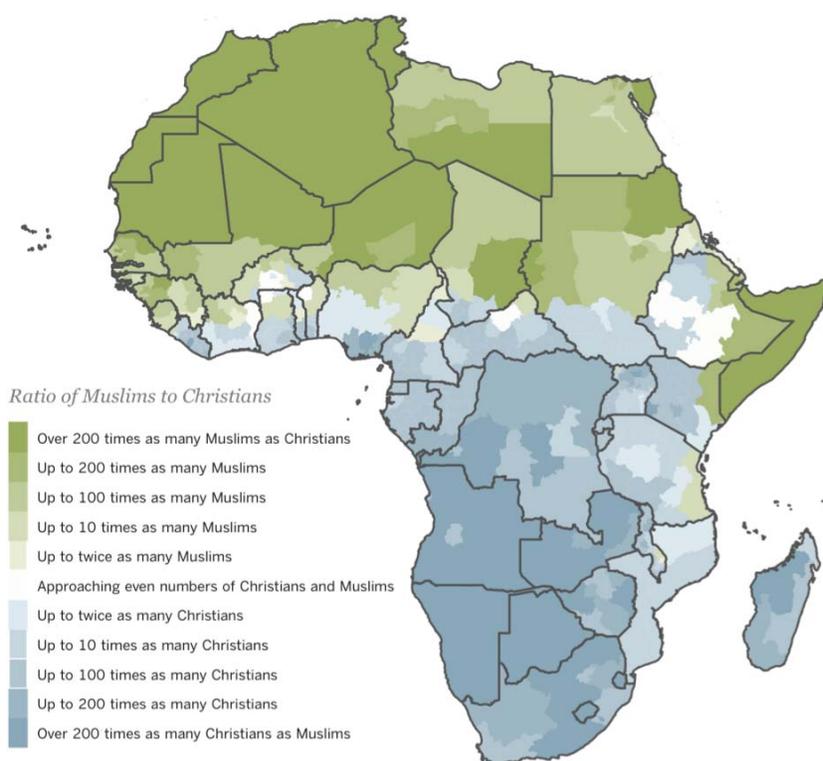
Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, April 2010

¹ The 15% estimate is based on data from the Pew Forum's 2009 report, "Mapping the Global Muslim Population"; other estimates based on data from the World Religion Database.

While sub-Saharan Africa has almost twice as many Christians as Muslims, on the African continent as a whole the two faiths are roughly balanced, with 400 million to 500 million followers each. Since northern Africa is heavily Muslim and southern Africa is heavily Christian, the great meeting place is in the middle, a 4,000-mile swath from Somalia in the east to Senegal in the west.

Muslims and Christians in Africa

This map shows the ratio of Muslims to Christians in each country and province. The north is heavily Muslim, and the south is heavily Christian.



Sources: censuses, demographic and health surveys, and the World Religion Database

Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, April 2010

To some outside observers, this is a volatile religious fault line – the site, for example, of al-Qaeda’s first major terrorist strike, the bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, and more recently of ethnic and sectarian bloodshed in Nigeria, where hundreds of Muslims and Christians have been killed.

To others, religion is not so much a source of conflict as a source of hope in sub-Saharan Africa, where religious leaders and movements are a major force in civil society and a key provider of relief and development for the needy, particularly given the widespread reality of failed states and collapsing government services.

But how do sub-Saharan Africans *themselves* view

the role of religion in their lives and societies? To address this question, the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life, with generous funding from The Pew Charitable Trusts and the John Templeton Foundation, conducted a major public opinion survey involving more than 25,000 face-to-face interviews in more than 60 languages or dialects in 19 countries, representing 75% of the total population of sub-Saharan Africa.

Our survey asked people to describe their religious beliefs and practices. We sought to gauge their knowledge of, and attitudes toward, other faiths. We tried to assess their degree of political and economic satisfaction; their concerns about crime, corruption and extremism; their positions on issues such as abortion and polygamy; and their views of democracy, religious law and the place of women in society.

The resulting report offers a detailed and in some ways surprising portrait of religion and society in a wide variety of countries, some heavily Muslim, some heavily Christian and some mixed. Africans have long been seen as devout and morally conservative, and the survey largely confirms this. But insofar as the conventional wisdom has been that Africans are lacking in tolerance for people of other faiths, it may need rethinking.

The report also may pose some apparent paradoxes, at least to Western readers. The survey findings suggest that many Africans are deeply committed to Islam or Christianity and yet continue to practice elements of traditional African religions. Many support democracy and say it is a good thing that people from other religions are able to practice their faith freely. At the same time, they also favor making the Bible or sharia law the official law of the land. And while both Muslims and Christians recognize positive attributes in one another, tensions lie close to the surface.

It is our hope that the survey will contribute to a better understanding of the role religion plays in the private and public lives of the approximately 820 million people living in sub-Saharan Africa. This report is part of a larger effort – the Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project – that aims to increase people’s knowledge of religion around the world.

In preparing this survey, the Pew Forum sought the counsel of scholars with expertise in sub-Saharan Africa. Peter Lewis, associate professor and director of African Studies at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, served as a special adviser to the project. We also received invaluable assistance from Amaney Jamal, assistant professor in the Department of Politics at Princeton University and a Pew Forum consultant on global Islam, and Timothy Samuel Shah, senior research fellow at the Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs at Boston University and a Pew Forum consultant on global Christianity.

Many others advised us in the conceptualization and development of the survey, and we would like to extend special thanks to the following individuals: Teresa Cruz e Silva, Center for African Studies, University of Eduardo Mondlane, Maputo, Mozambique; Stephen Ellis, African Studies Centre, The Netherlands; Tibebe Eshete, Michigan State University; Christopher Fomunyoh, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs; Rosalind Hackett, Department of Religious Studies, University of Tennessee, Knoxville; Ogbu Kalu (deceased), McCormick Theological Seminary; Gina Lambright, Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University; Peter Mandaville, Department of Public and International Affairs, George Mason University; David Maxwell, School of History, Keele University; Ali Mazrui, Institute of Global Cultural Studies, Binghamton University, State University of New York;

Sulayman Nyang, African Studies Department, Howard University; John Paden, School of Public Policy, George Mason University; Dana Robert, School of Theology, Center for Global Christianity & Mission, Boston University; Lamin Sanneh, Yale Divinity School; Gerrie Ter Haar, International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University, Rotterdam, The Netherlands; and R. Bruce Yoder, Mennonite Mission Network (on study leave at Boston University). The fieldwork for this survey was carried out by Princeton Survey Research Associates International, led by PSRAI President Mary McIntosh.

The survey design was guided by the counsel of our advisers, contractors and consultants, but the Pew Forum is solely responsible for the interpretation and reporting of the data.

– Luis Lugo and Alan Cooperman

Sub-Saharan Africa

This map highlights in bold the 19 countries in sub-Saharan Africa where the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life conducted public opinion surveys.



Source: United Nations
Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, April 2010