

# Chapter 1: Religious Affiliation

Most people in sub-Saharan Africa now identify with either Christianity or Islam. In most of the 19 countries surveyed by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, 90% or more of the respondents say they belong to one of these faiths. This is in sharp contrast with the religious composition of the region about 100 years ago, when, according to a Pew Forum analysis of historical information from the World Religion Database, less than a quarter of the population identified as either Christian or Muslim.

As the map in the preface to this report shows, sub-Saharan Africa is much more religiously mixed than northern Africa, where the population is overwhelmingly Muslim. Overall, however, Christians outnumber Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa by about two-to-one. As the map also shows, the ratio of Christians to Muslims increases the further south one goes in the continent. Muslim populations are especially concentrated in a large geographic belt running west to east from Senegal to the Horn of Africa.<sup>1</sup> Southern Africa is predominantly Christian.

In three of the countries surveyed (Djibouti, Mali and Senegal), Muslims clearly outnumber Christians. In four countries (Chad, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria and Tanzania), the number of Christians and Muslims is more equally divided, with a ratio of less than two-to-one in either direction.<sup>2</sup> The other countries surveyed are predominantly Christian with Muslim minorities of varying sizes. In Cameroon, Ethiopia, Liberia and Mozambique, Muslims account for between 15% and 30% of survey respondents. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Kenya and Uganda, between 10% and 15% of respondents are Muslim. And in Botswana, Rwanda, South Africa and Zambia, the survey finds that 5% or less identify as Muslim. Nigeria, the most populous country in all of Africa, has the largest number of Muslims as well as the largest number of Christians in the region.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Horn of Africa is a peninsula in the easternmost part of North East Africa, on the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. It includes Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti.

<sup>2</sup> The World Religion Database estimates that roughly four-in-ten people in Guinea Bissau are Muslim and approximately one-in-ten are Christian, with the rest of the population associated with traditional African religions. The Pew Forum's survey finds a similar number of people in Guinea Bissau identifying themselves as Muslim (38%) but a much higher percentage identifying themselves as Christian (62%) and very few describing themselves mainly as practitioners of traditional African faiths.

<sup>3</sup> Nigeria's 2006 census did not ask about religious affiliation, and recent estimates of the numbers of Muslims and Christians in the country vary. According to the 2003 Demographic and Health Survey, for example, Muslims constituted 50% of the population, while the 2008 DHS figure is 45% and the Nigerian Ministry of Health's 2008 estimate is 50%. The Pew Forum's survey found 52% of the population is Muslim. Regardless of the variation, it is still true that Nigeria has both the largest number of Muslims and the largest number of Christians in the region.

As discussed elsewhere in this report, many Christians and Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa retain beliefs and rituals that are characteristic of traditional African religions. In most countries, however, less than one-in-twenty say this is their primary religious affiliation. Liberia is the only country where more than one-in-ten (12%) identify primarily with an African traditional religion.

Unlike in Europe and the United States, very few people in sub-Saharan Africa say they are unaffiliated with a particular faith. Mozambique, Botswana and South Africa are the only countries surveyed where a significant number of people (roughly one-in-ten) describe their religion as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular.” In all the other countries, the figure is closer to zero.

Religious Affiliation					
	<u>Christian</u>	<u>Muslim</u>	<u>Traditional African religions</u>	<u>Unaffiliated</u>	<u>Other/DK/Refused</u>
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Predominantly Muslim</b>					
Djibouti	2	97	0	0	0=100
Mali	8	90	1	0	0=100
Senegal	10	89	1	0	0=100
<b>Roughly even mix</b>					
Chad	40	54	3	3	1=100
Guinea Bissau	62	38	0	0	0=100
Nigeria	46	52	1	0	0=100
Tanzania	60	36	2	1	0=100
<b>Predominantly Christian</b>					
<i>Large Muslim minority</i>					
Cameroon	80	16	1	2	0=100
Ethiopia	69	30	0	0	0=100
Liberia	69	19	12	0	0=100
Mozambique	63	23	1	13	1=100
<i>Small Muslim minority</i>					
DR Congo	80	12	3	4	1=100
Ghana	83	11	4	1	0=100
Kenya	88	11	0	0	0=100
Uganda	86	13	0	0	0=100
<i>Few Muslims</i>					
Botswana	87	2	1	9	0=100
Rwanda	93	5	0	1	1=100
South Africa	87	2	4	7	1=100
Zambia	98	2	0	1	0=100

Q32. What is your present religion, if any? (READ LIST, SHOW CARD) Christian; Muslim; ancestral, tribal, animist, or other traditional African religion; Hindu; Buddhist; Bahai; Jewish; atheist; agnostic; something else; nothing in particular?

## Diversity Within Islam

Reflecting the global composition of Islam, Sunni Muslims greatly outnumber Shia Muslims in every country surveyed. (See glossary for more information on Sunni and Shia Muslims.) Chad and Tanzania are the only countries where Shia Muslims constitute a significant portion of the Muslim respondents (around 20%). There are significant minorities in many countries (and a majority of Muslims in Mali) who identify themselves neither as Sunni nor Shia but rather as “just a Muslim.” At least 10% of Muslims in a few countries (Ghana, Tanzania, Cameroon and Liberia) describe themselves as members of the Ahmadiyya community. Many Muslims also belong to a variety of brotherhoods that are associated with Sufism, a mystical movement within Islam. (See glossary for more information on Ahmadiyya and Sufi Muslims.)

### Affiliation of Muslims

	<u>Sunni</u>	<u>Shia</u>	<u>Ahmadiyya</u>	<u>Something else</u>	<u>“Just a Muslim”</u>	<u>None / Don’t know / Refused</u>
<b>Predominantly Muslim</b>	%	%	%	%	%	%
Djibouti	77	2	0	0	8	13=100
Mali	20	0	2	1	55	22=100
Senegal	55	0	1	6	27	12=100
<b>Roughly even mix</b>						
Chad	48	21	4	0	23	4=100
Guinea Bissau	40	6	2	0	36	16=100
Nigeria	38	12	3	2	42	4=100
Tanzania	41	20	15	1	20	4=100
<b>Predominantly Christian</b>						
<i>Large Muslim minority</i>						
Cameroon	27	3	12	5	40	13=100
Ethiopia	68	2	0	2	23	5=100
Liberia	38	9	10	0	22	21=100
<i>Small Muslim minority</i>						
DR Congo	50	10	6	0	14	20=100
Ghana	51	8	16	0	13	11=100
Kenya	73	8	4	0	8	7=100
Uganda	40	7	4	0	33	16=100

Q37. Are you Sunni (for example, Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi, or Hanbali), Shia (for example, Ithnashari/Twelvever or Ismaili/Sevener), or something else?

Based on Muslims. Countries with relatively few Muslims are not shown in the table. Due to data collection problems, estimates for Q37 in Mozambique are not reported here.

## Diversity Within Christianity

There is a great deal of diversity among Christians in sub-Saharan Africa with respect to denominational affiliation. In seven countries with Christian samples large enough to analyze (Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, South Africa and Zambia), clear majorities of Christians are Protestants. In three countries (Cameroon, Guinea Bissau and Rwanda), clear majorities are Catholics. In six countries (Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda), neither Catholics nor Protestants form a clear majority. In Ethiopia, most Christians (71%) identify with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. (See glossary for more information on the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.)

Protestantism is itself quite diverse in sub-Saharan Africa, with each country displaying a unique blend of denominational affiliations. For example, Baptists make up roughly one-in-five Christians in Chad and Liberia, and Presbyterians account for more than one-in-ten Christians in Cameroon and Ghana. Adventists have a significant following in Zambia, while Anglicans account for roughly 10% or more of Christian respondents in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Nigeria. In South Africa and Botswana, more than one-quarter of Christian respondents belong to what are known as African Independent Churches (also known as African Initiated Churches, African Indigenous Churches or AICs). (See glossary for more information on AICs.) Pentecostalism is the one Protestant denominational family that has a significant presence (roughly 10% or more) in nearly all countries with a substantial Protestant population. It is the single largest Protestant group in seven countries (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Rwanda and Zambia).

### Affiliation of Christians

	<u>Protestant</u>	<u>Catholic</u>	<u>Other/DK/ Refused</u>
	%	%	%
South Africa	84	11	5=100
Liberia	81	13	6=100
Ghana	71	25	4=100
Kenya	64	34	2=100
Botswana	64	22	14=100
Nigeria	60	37	4=100
Zambia	60	26	14=100
Mozambique	52	44	3=100
Uganda	46	53	2=100
Tanzania	44	51	5=100
Chad	41	54	5=100
DR Congo	40	46	14=100
Rwanda	40	58	2=100
Cameroon	39	54	7=100
Ethiopia*	27	1	72=100
Guinea Bissau	2	95	2=100

Q35. See topline for question wording.

*Note: Based on Christians. Countries that are majority Muslim are not shown in the table.*

\* In Ethiopia most Christians (71%) identified themselves as Ethiopian Orthodox (see glossary for more information).

## Affiliation of Protestants as a Percentage of Christians

	Pente- costal	African Indep. Churches	Anglican	Baptist	Seventh- day Adventist	Pres- byterian	Meth- odist	Lu- theran	Other Prot.	Non- Prot. Christian	Total Christian
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
South Africa	10	35	6	3	1	2	11	4	12	16	=100
Liberia	26	3	4	17	4	3	12	11	2	19	=100
Ghana	26	5	4	3	4	17	11	0	2	29	=100
Kenya	16	12	14	2	8	6	3	1	3	36	=100
Botswana	14	27	2	3	6	0	1	6	5	36	=100
Nigeria	26	8	9	8	0	1	4	1	3	40	=100
Zambia	18	4	4	7	13	2	2	0	9	40	=100
Mozambique	12	9	1	3	2	2	3	1	19	48	=100
Uganda	8	0	22	2	3	0	0	0	10	54	=100
Tanzania	10	5	10	1	3	0	0	13	0	56	=100
Chad	8	1	0	20	2	0	0	6	4	59	=100
DR Congo	18	6	2	3	1	1	3	1	5	60	=100
Rwanda	15	3	4	3	9	4	2	1	1	60	=100
Cameroon	5	0	0	5	2	13	0	3	11	61	=100
Ethiopia	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	73	=100
Guinea Bissau	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	98	=100

Q35. See survey topline for question wording.

Based on Christians. Countries that are majority Muslim are not shown in the table.

## No Substantial Gains From Religious Switching

The survey finds that in sub-Saharan Africa, small percentages have switched from Christianity to Islam, and vice versa, but in most countries the net change is practically nil. In Uganda, however, roughly one-third of respondents who were raised Muslim now describe themselves as Christian (32%), while far fewer Ugandans who were raised Christian now describe themselves as Muslim.

Religious switching has had an impact on the internal composition of Christianity in several countries. In Rwanda, for instance, the percentage of people who are currently Catholic is 12 points lower than the percentage who were raised Catholic (54% of Rwandans are currently Catholic compared with 66% who were raised Catholic). At the same time, the number of Rwandans who say they are currently Protestant is 12 points greater than the number saying they were raised Protestant. The survey finds similar though less pronounced results in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia, where Catholics have experienced net losses and Protestants net gains through religious switching. In Uganda this pattern is reversed; the proportion of respondents who are currently Catholic is 7 percentage points greater than the percentage that were raised Catholic, while the proportion who are currently Protestant is 5 points lower than the percentage raised Protestant.

Switching Within Christianity						
	Raised Catholic	Currently Catholic	Net change	Raised Protestant	Currently Protestant	Net change
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Roughly even mix</b>						
Chad	22	22	0	16	16	0
Guinea Bissau	58	59	+1	1	1	0
Nigeria	20	17	-3	24	28	+4
Tanzania	32	31	-1	23	27	+4
<b>Predominantly Christian</b>						
<i>Large Muslim majority</i>						
Cameroon	47	44	-3	30	31	+1
Ethiopia	1	1	0	14	18	+4
Liberia	10	9	-1	55	56	1
<i>Small Muslim minority</i>						
DR Congo	45	37	-8	26	32	+6
Ghana	24	21	-3	54	59	+5
Kenya	33	30	-3	55	57	+2
Uganda	38	45	+7	44	39	-5
<i>Few Muslims</i>						
Botswana	19	19	0	55	55	0
Rwanda	66	54	-12	26	38	+12
South Africa	11	10	-1	74	72	-2
Zambia	32	25	-7	52	58	+6

Q32-35, Q73-75. Due to data collection problems, results for Q75 in Mozambique are not reported.