

Transformation of the religious profile of Africa

In our [previous blog](#) we remarked on the drastic religious transformation that Africa has experienced in the course of the twentieth century. In this note, we look at the changing religious profile of Africa and its different regions and countries in detail.

At the beginning of the century, 58 percent of the population of Africa followed native Ethnic Religions; Muslims had a share of 32 percent in the population and Christians had a share of less than 10 percent. In 2010, Ethnic Religions have been reduced to less than 9 percent of the population, while the share of Christians has risen spectacularly to 48 percent and that of Muslims have grown to 42 percent of the population.

The continent now has a distinct north-south divide on the basis of religion. Northern parts of Africa are largely Muslim and the southern parts largely Christian, while the countries in the central parts are divided between the two.

North Africa has been a part of the Muslim world. Population of this region was 82 percent Muslim in 1900; it is 89 percent Muslim now. There are not many Christians in the region, but they have carved out a Christian majority country of South Sudan.

East Africa is now 66 percent Christian and 22 percent Muslim; the share of the two communities in 1900 was 16 and 2.5 percent, respectively. More than 70 percent of the population followed Ethnic Religions; their share is now less than 11 percent. Muslims have a significant presence in the northern parts in Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea and in Tanzania in the south. Kenya and Uganda in the central East Africa and Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi in the south have turned mostly Christian. Ethnic Religions retain a considerable presence only in Mozambique and Madagascar.

South Africa is 82 percent Christian; they had a share of 37 percent in 1900 also. There are few Muslims in this region and the Ethnic Religionists have been mostly converted.

There were not many Christians or Muslims in Central Africa in 1900. The region is now 82 percent Christian. The few Muslims here are mostly confined to Chad and Cameroon.

West Africa is divided between Muslims and Christians with the former dominating the north and the latter the south. Ethnic Religionists, who formed more than 70 percent of the population in 1900, are now left with a significant presence only in some of the smaller countries in the northwest part of West Africa.

This religious transformation of Africa has not only been rapid and drastic, it has also been contentious in many countries where Christianity and Islam have faced each other in their quest for conversions. Such conflicts have been the most intense in the eastern, central and western parts of Africa, where the dominance of either of the two is not yet fully established. The religious contention has exacerbated and given a sharper edge to the pre-existing ethnic differences.

Religious profile of Africa

Population (in thousands) of different religions in Africa

	1900	1970	1990	2000	2010
Total	107,784	356,909	614,641	784,313	1,022,236
Christian	9,917	143,701	276,391	360,127	494,052
Muslim	34,484	143,087	251,050	317,355	425,863
Ethnic R	62,686	67,430	79,520	96,805	89,354
Non R/Atheist	8	686	3,918	5,439	7,070
Others	689	2,005	3,762	4,586	5,897

Percent share of different religions in the population

	1900	1970	1990	2000	2010
Christian	9.20	40.26	44.97	45.92	48.33
Muslim	31.99	40.09	40.85	40.46	41.66
Ethnic R	58.16	18.89	12.94	12.34	8.74
Non R/Atheist	0.01	0.19	0.64	0.69	0.69
Others	0.64	0.56	0.61	0.58	0.58

The figures, in this and other Tables here, are from the *World Christian Encyclopaedia* for 1900 to 2000, and for 2010 from *World's Religions in Figures*. For detailed references and a background of these sources, please refer to our [earlier blog](#). The figures can be different than those counted in the individual country Censuses, but perhaps correctly capture the trends. In the following, the Non-Religious are also referred to as Agnostics.

Ethnic Religions disappear as Christianity and Islam grow

As we have mentioned in our previous note, the religious profile of Africa has been transformed in the course of the twentieth century. In 1900, 58 percent of the people of Africa followed their own indigenous religions, which are now referred to as Ethnic Religions. Another 32 percent were Muslim and only about 9 percent were Christian. In 2010, the share of native Ethnic religions has been reduced to less than 9 percent, while that of Christians has risen to more than 48 percent of the population. The share of Muslims has also increased from around 32 to 42 percent.

Growth of Muslims may have slowed down

As seen in the Table, much of the increase in the share of Muslims had taken place already by 1970. Between 1970 and 2000, their share remained more or less constant, but there has been a significant rise during the last decade. The share of Christians, however, has been growing rapidly from decade to decade.

Number of Christians has multiplied 50 times

Population of Africa in this period has grown by about 9.5 times, but the number of Christians has multiplied by nearly 50 times. Muslims have multiplied by a relatively modest factor of 12.4, while the number of Ethnic religionists has increased marginally from 63 million to 89 million.

Different regions of Africa have changed differently

The drastic changes in the religious profile of Africa that we have noticed above have not been uniform across all parts of the continent. It is instructive to see how different regions and countries have changed during this period.

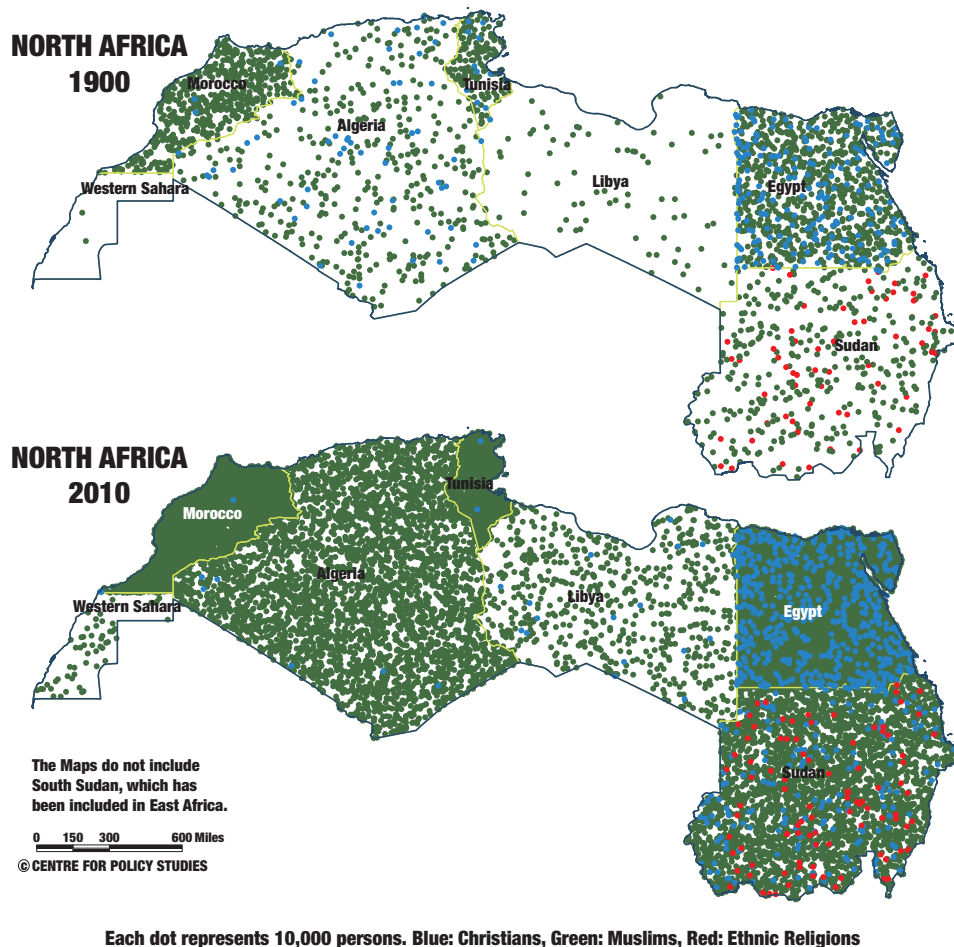
North Africa

Population (in thousands) of different religions in North Africa

	1900	1970	1990	2000	2010
Total	28,185	85,260	141,913	173,136	209,458
Christian	2,680	7,882	13,074	15,761	16,762
Muslim	23,066	73,776	124,027	151,850	186,696
Ethnic R	2,077	3,258	3,275	3,518	4,475
Non R/Atheist	6	294	1,533	2,004	1,415
Others	356	51	3	2	109
Percent share of different religions in the population					
Christian	9.51	9.24	9.21	9.10	8.00
Muslim	81.84	86.53	87.40	87.71	89.13
Ethnic R	7.37	3.82	2.31	2.03	2.14

North Africa is part of the Muslim world

North Africa is geographically and culturally different than the sub-Saharan Africa and is generally considered to be a part of the Muslim world. In 2010, 89 percent of the population of North Africa is Muslim. In 1900, the share of Muslims was somewhat less at about 82 percent. The rise in the Muslim share has been largely at the cost of the native Ethnic Religions, who formed 7.4 percent of the population in 1900 and have now been reduced to 2.1 percent. Christians formed 9.5 percent of the population in 1900; their share has also slightly declined to 8 percent.



Christianity is limited to a few countries of North Africa

As can be seen in the map above, Christianity in North Africa has been confined to only a few countries. At the beginning of the twentieth century, nearly all the Christians of North Africa were in Egypt and Algeria, now all of them are in Sudan, mainly in the newly formed country of South Sudan, which is considered a part of East and not North Africa. Of 2.7 million Christians in 1900, nearly 2 million were in Egypt and more than half a million in Algeria. Of 16.7 million Christians in 2010, 8.2 million are in Egypt and 8.3 million in Sudan (including South Sudan). There are hardly any Christians left in Algeria now, and there were hardly any in Sudan in 1900.

Christians in North Africa ('000)

	1900	1970	2010
North Africa	2,680	7,882	16,762
Egypt	1,954	6,346	8,183
Algeria	563	105	62
Sudan*	2	1,175	8,290

*Including South Sudan (in East Africa).

Christians in Egypt

In Egypt, Christians formed nearly 19 percent of the population in 1900; this included about 11 percent crypto-Christians and 8 percent professing Christians. The share of professing Christians has now increased to 10 percent. The sharp decline in their share seen in the Table here during 2000-10 is partly because of the reworking of the data to exclude the category of crypto-Christians. But there also has been an actual decline in the share of Christians in the population because of the relatively higher growth rates of the majority Muslims and considerable out-migration of the Christians. Nearly all of the Christians in Egypt are Coptic Christians belonging to the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria.

Christians in Egypt ('000)

	1900	1970	2010
Total	10,500	35,285	81,121
Christian	1,954	6,346	8,183
% Share	18.61	17.99	10.09

Christians in Algeria

Algeria acquired its Christian population in the early period of French rule, when efforts were made to colonize the country with Europeans. The Christian share of more than 12 percent in 1900 is a reflection of that large European presence. After Independence in 1962, the European settlers were forced to flee Algeria. That exodus is reflected in the number of Christians declining from 563 thousand in 1900 to just 105 thousand in 1970 and in the lowering of their share from 12.24 to 0.77 percent. The share of Christians has since declined further to 0.17 percent.

Christians in Algeria ('000)

	1900	1970	2010
Total	4,600	13,746	35,468
Christian	563	105	62
% Share	12.24	0.77	0.17

Christians in Sudan

Sudan has the second largest population of Christians in North Africa after Egypt. Unlike Egypt, however, there were hardly any Christians in Sudan in 1900. Much of the growth of Christianity has happened in the second half of the twentieth century and mainly in the south. The share of Christians in the population of Sudan (including South Sudan) rose from nearly zero in 1900 to 7.96 percent in 1970 and has reached up to 19 percent now in 2010. This rapid spread of Christianity into the south of Sudan has led to protracted and violent strife and ultimately to the secession of the Christian south from the Muslim north.

Christians in Sudan* ('000)

	1900	1970	2010
Total	5,470	14,766	43,552
Christian	2.4	1,175	8,290
% Share	0.04	7.96	19.03

*Including South Sudan.

Religious Conflict in Sudan

The northern part of Sudan is inhabited largely by the Arab Muslims and the southern by the black Africans of the Nile valley, also known as the Nilotic people, who until the middle of the twentieth century were adherents of the native Ethnic religions. Both Islam and Christianity have long contended to claim the people of the south. But Christian missions had little success in their efforts up to 1956, when the country gained Independence from the colonial British rule. Independence was immediately followed by protracted Civil Wars. Formally, the first of these Wars is said to have run from 1956 to 1972 and the second from 1983 to 2005. But the conflict continued even during the inter-War years, and has not ended yet. Christianity flourished amidst the Wars and over time the conflict began to take the form of a religious confrontation. A study of the Library of Congress traces the developments thus:

“Originally, the Nilotic peoples were indifferent to Christianity, but in the latter half of the twentieth century many people in the educated elite embraced its tenets, at least superficially. English and Christianity have become symbols of resistance to the Muslim government in the north, which has vowed to destroy both. Unlike the early civil strife of the 1960s and 1970s, the insurgency of the 1980s and 1990s has taken on a more religiously confrontational character.” [Helen Chapin Metz (ed.), *Sudan: A Country Study*, 4th Edition, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, Washington, 1992].

The conflict led to the division of Sudan

The Civil War ultimately ended in 2005 with the intervention of US President George W. Bush, an evangelical Christian who, during his Presidency, accorded top priority to the Sudanese conflict and appointed an ordained Episcopal priest, Senator John Danforth, as his special envoy to negotiate the peace. The peace agreement resulted in the division of the country and secession of the Christian dominated South Sudan in 2011.

But the conflict continues

The division of the country, however, has not led to cessation of conflict. Besides the continuing tensions with the north on various unsettled issues, South Sudan has been facing a bloody ethnic conflict between the two largest ethnic groups, the Dinka and the Nuer. The conflict between these two can be traced back to the colonial times, when sections of the Dinka supported British rule, while the Nuer resisted. The ethnic war in South Sudan has now spread to encompass other smaller groups also.

One of the bloodiest conflicts of history

The unending civil wars between the north and south since the middle of the twentieth century and the on-going ethnic conflict within South Sudan are among the cruellest and bloodiest conflicts of the world. To a large extent these bloody conflicts are a result of the contention between Islam and Christianity for winning adherents among the native Ethnic religionists. Similar, though not as protracted or as bloody, conflicts have been playing out in several parts of the Africa.

Religious Demography of North and South Sudan

Religious demography of north and south Sudan						
	Population '000			%Share		
	1900	1970	2010	1900	1970	2010
SUDAN (NORTH)						
Total	3,987	10,981	32,754	100.00	100.00	100.00
Christian	2	318	1,761	0.06	2.90	5.38
Muslim	3,390	9,732	29,718	85.03	88.63	90.73
Ethnic Religions	594	800	925	14.91	7.29	2.82
SOUTH SUDAN						
Total	1,483	3,785	10,798	100.00	100.00	100.00
Christian	0	857	6,529	0.01	22.64	60.46
Muslim	90	230	667	6.07	6.08	6.18
Ethnic Religions	1,393	2,695	3,550	93.92	71.21	32.88

Sudan was largely Muslim

In 1900, Muslims formed 85 percent of the population of what constitutes Sudan now, after the separation of South Sudan. The remaining about 15 percent of the population followed the native Ethnic Religions. There were only about 2 thousand Christians, who were probably Coptic Christian immigrants from Egypt. The share of Muslims in the population has risen to above 90 percent in 2010 and even Christians have obtained a significant presence of 5.4 percent in the population. The share of Ethnic Religions has correspondingly declined to less than 3 percent.

South Sudan followed Ethnic Religions

In South Sudan, there were no Christians and only a few Muslims in 1900. Nearly 94 percent of the population followed their native Ethnic Religions. The proportion of Muslims has remained nearly unchanged throughout the century at around 6 percent. The share of Christians, however, rose to 22.6 percent in 1970 and has reached 60.5 percent now in 2010; the share of Ethnic Religions has correspondingly declined to about 33 percent. Even so, 3.6 million Ethnic Religionists of South Sudan constitute their largest presence in North Africa. Nearly all of the remaining 0.9 million are in Sudan (North). There are few Ethnic Religionists in other countries of North Africa.

Ethnic Religions have been largely eliminated in Sudan

Thus, the conflict between the Christians and Muslims has resulted in the near extinction of the native Ethnic Religions of Sudan. The north of Sudan has been claimed almost entirely by Islam and the south is on the way to becoming an entirely Christian nation. South Sudan now has the distinction of being the only Christian majority country in the Muslim North Africa. Perhaps in recognition of this oddity, South Sudan is now counted as a part of East Africa and not North Africa in the United Nations classification. Therefore, we have included South Sudan in the Map of East Africa below, rather than that of North Africa.

Christians in Libya

Besides, Egypt and Sudan, Christians have a significant presence only in Libya. Their number there has risen from less than 8 thousand in 1970 to 172 thousand now. In 2010, Christians form as much as 2.7 percent of the population. But only a few of the Christians are native Libyans. A large majority of them are either Coptic Orthodox Christians from Egypt or migrant workers and refugees from other African countries.

Other countries of North Africa are almost entirely Muslim

Except for Egypt, Sudan and South Sudan, other countries of North Africa are overwhelmingly Muslim. Muslims form 97 percent of the population of Libya, 98.5 percent of Algeria and more than 99 percent of Morocco, Tunisia and West Sahara.

Jews in North Africa

At the beginning of the twentieth century, there were 356 thousand Jews in North Africa and they formed 1.26 percent of the population. Now there are only about 9.5 thousand Jews in the region. Of 356 thousand Jews in 1900, 156 thousand were in Morocco, 50 thousand in Algeria, 40 thousand in Libya and 30 thousand in Egypt. They formed as much as 5 percent of the population of Libya in 1900.

Buddhists and Chinese Religionists

In North Africa, there has been some presence of Buddhists since 1970 and of Chinese Religionists more recently. Of 27 thousand Buddhists in 2010, 20 thousand are in Libya and 5 thousand in Algeria. Of 17 thousand Chinese Religionists in 2010, 11 thousand are in Algeria.

Hindus and Sikhs

There are about 7.4 thousand Hindus and 2.3 thousand Sikhs in North Africa. Nearly all the Sikhs and 5.7 thousand of the Hindus are in Libya. The remaining Hindus are in Egypt and Sudan.

Baha'is

There are about 48 thousand Baha'is in North Africa; of these, nearly 33 thousand are in Morocco and about 7 thousand in Egypt. There are small communities of Baha'is in other countries also.

Non-Religionists and Atheists

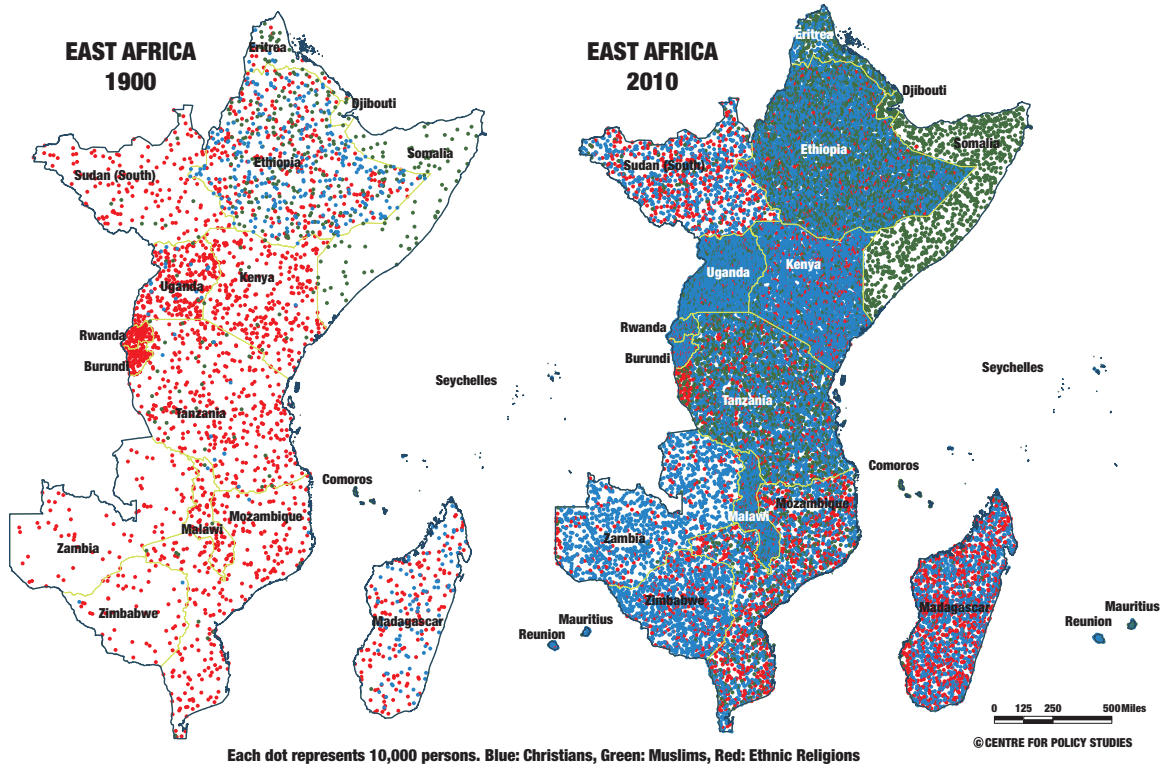
There are about 1.4 million Non-Religionists and Atheists in North Africa. Their numbers began to rise in the 1980s and have begun to decline now. Of the 1.4 million in this category, about 490 thousand are in Egypt, 450 thousand in Algeria and 400 thousand in Sudan (including South Sudan).

Religious Demography of East Africa

Population (in thousands) of different religions in East Africa					
	1900	1970	1990	2000	2010
Total	28,044	108,448	191,717	246,966	324,047
Christian	4,516	55,447	116,359	151,116	214,012
Muslim	3,542	21,632	39,147	51,030	70,825
Ethnic R	19,737	30,198	33,602	41,541	35,208
Non R/Atheist	0	60	659	954	967
Others	250	1,171	2,608	3,280	4,002
Percent share of different religions in the population					
Christian	16.10	51.13	60.69	61.19	66.04
Muslim	12.63	19.95	20.42	20.66	21.86
Ethnic R	70.38	27.85	17.53	16.82	10.86

East Africa has been largely converted to Christianity

At the beginning of the twentieth century, there were 4.5 million Christians in East Africa; of them nearly 3 million were in Ethiopia and another 1 million in Madagascar. There were no other major Christian communities in the region then. In the course of the century, their numbers have multiplied nearly 50 times, while the total population has grown less than 12 times. Christians now form two-thirds of the population. The share of Muslims in the population has increased from about 13 percent in 1900 to 22 percent in 2010. The share of native Ethnic Religions of the region has correspondingly declined from more than 70 to less than 11 percent.



East Africa is a large region and, as seen in the Map above, different parts and countries of it have been affected differently by the religious conversions of the twentieth century. We discuss some of the individual countries below.

Somalia and Djibouti

Somalia lies in the Horn of Africa at the northeast edge of the continent. It has been a Muslim country and, unlike much of Africa, has seen almost no change in its religious profile during the twentieth century. Djibouti, previously known as the French Somaliland, is a small enclave that the French manipulated to keep apart from Somalia at the time of Independence of the rest of the country from Britain and Italy in the 1960s. Djibouti, a country of less than 9 lakh people in 2010, is also almost predominantly Muslim, though it has acquired a small Christian presence of less than 2 percent since 1970.

Religious Profile Somalia ('000)			
	1900	1970	2010
Total	764	3,601	9,331
Muslim	763	3,591	9,308
% Share	99.92	99.73	99.75

Ethiopia

One of the earliest Christian communities in history is said to have formed in Ethiopia. At the beginning of the 20th century, 38 percent of the population of Ethiopia was Christian, 25 percent Muslim and the remaining 37 percent followed the native Ethnic Religions. In the course of the century, the share of Ethnic Religions has declined to merely 6 percent, while that of Christians has risen to nearly 60 percent and of Muslims to 34 percent. A large majority of the followers of Ethnic Religions thus seem to have been converted to Christianity. A considerable proportion of the Christians in Ethiopia, perhaps more than 40 million of the 50 million Christians in 2010, are adherents of the Oriental Orthodox Church.

Religious Profile of Ethiopia (*000)

	1900	1970	2010
Total	7,560	28,791	82,950
Christian	2,871	15,433	49,672
Muslim	1,860	8,628	28,123
Ethnic R	2,819	4,695	5,017
%C	37.98	53.60	59.88
%M	24.60	29.97	33.90
% Ethnic	37.29	16.31	6.05

Eretria

Eretria was made part of the Ethiopian Federation on Independence from the British in the 1950s. It separated from the federation in 1993 after a three-decades long war. Religious demography of Eretria is similar to that of Ethiopia. Of 5.2 million Eritreans in 2010, 2.5 million are Christians and 2.6 million Muslims. In 1900 also, Muslims formed 50 percent of the much smaller population then, but there were only 16 percent Christians and the remaining 34 percent were adherents of Ethnic Religions. There are few Ethnic Religionists left in Eretria now.

Kenya, Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda

Nearly the whole populations of Kenya, Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda in central East Africa were adherents of native Ethnic Religions at the beginning of the twentieth century. Christians then had almost no presence in these countries, except in Uganda, where they formed nearly 7 percent of the population. At the end of the twentieth, nearly the whole populations of these countries have converted to Christianity. In all three countries, Muslims have also increased their share, but they form small minorities. In Kenya, the share of Muslims has risen from 3.5 to about 8 percent and there are still about 9 percent Ethnic Religionists there; the Christian share is therefore relatively low at 81 percent. In Uganda, Muslim share has registered a somewhat higher rise to near 12 percent. Christians there now form more than 84 percent of the population. In the relatively smaller countries of Burundi and Rwanda, Christians form more than 90 percent of the populations and the rest are divided between Muslims and Ethnic Religionists. Burundi has only 2 percent Muslims and 5 percent Ethnic Religionists. Rwanda has nearly 5 percent Muslims and the share of Ethnic Religionists there is only around 3 percent.

Religious Profile of Kenya, Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda

	1900	1970	2010
KENYA			
Total	2,900	11,498	40,513
%C	0.17	63.49	81.27
%M	3.45	6.40	7.95
%E	95.85	28.08	8.86
UGANDA			
Total	2,650	9,806	33,425
%C	6.79	69.00	84.44
%M	2.00	5.22	11.72
%E	91.20	21.95	2.29
BURUNDI			
Total	1,010	3,514	8,383
%C	0.01	73.40	92.15
%M	0.20	0.85	2.11
%E	99.79	25.70	5.51
RWANDA			
Total	1,070	3,728	10,624
%C	0.01	61.25	91.51
%M	0.19	8.37	4.78
%E	99.80	30.20	3.31

Total population in thousands.

Tanzania, Mozambique and Madagascar

These countries in the southern part of East Africa are only partly Christianised. The share of Christians in the population in all three is between 50 and 60 percent. The remaining population in Tanzania and Mozambique is divided between Muslims and the native Ethnic Religions. The presence of Muslims is higher in Tanzania at nearly 32 percent of the population; in Mozambique, Muslims have a share of 17.5 percent and about 29.5 percent of the population continues to follow Ethnic Religions. There were only a few Christians and Muslims in 1900; Ethnic Religionists formed about 91 and 96 percent of the population, respectively, in Tanzania and Mozambique. There are not many Muslims in Madagascar, the island nation off the coast of southeast Africa. Ethnic Religions still claim adherence of nearly 40 percent of the population there. Even in 1900, there was a fairly high Christian presence of 39 percent in Madagascar. Christians obtained a foothold in Madagascar when the royal court converted to Christianity in the second half of the nineteenth century. The changes in the religious composition of Madagascar during the twentieth century, therefore, have not been as sharp as in other countries of Africa.

	1900	1970	2010
TANZANIA			
Total	3,800	13,694	44,841
%C	2.42	36.05	54.76
%M	7.00	31.48	31.62
%E	90.52	31.83	11.85
MOZAMBIQUE			
Total	2,600	9,395	23,391
%C	0.64	29.88	52.45
%M	3.01	12.19	17.47
%E	96.34	57.80	29.44
MADAGASCAR			
Total	2,580	6,860	20,714
%C	39.16	49.08	56.91
%M	0.50	1.63	2.11
%E	60.31	49.07	40.41
Total population in thousands.			

Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi

These three countries of southwest East Africa, unlike their eastern counterparts, have become predominantly Christian. The share of Christians in the population of all three in 2010 is around or above 80 percent. There are few Muslims in Zimbabwe and Zambia. However, Muslims have a presence of 13 percent in Malawi. Unusually, the proportion of Muslims in Malawi has declined between 1970 and 2010, indicating some conversion from Islam to Christianity. In 1900, more than 95 percent of the population of these countries were Ethnic Religionists. Their proportion has declined to less than 16 percent in Zimbabwe, about 11 percent in Zambia and 6 percent in Malawi. Ethnic Religions, which claimed adherence of nearly the entire populations of these countries, have thus been nearly eliminated and replaced with Christianity, and occasionally with Islam in Malawi, in the course of the twentieth century.

	1900	1970	2010
ZIMBABWE			
Total	500	5,260	12,571
%C	3.80	52.47	81.66
%M	0.20	0.95	0.73
%E	95.96	46.02	15.86
ZAMBIA			
Total	750	4,189	13,089
%C	0.27	66.50	85.47
%M	0.00	0.31	1.06
%E	99.73	32.49	11.19
MALAWI			
Total	750	4,518	14,901
%C	1.80	59.00	79.76
%M	3.00	16.05	13.19
%E	95.20	24.64	6.32
Total population in thousands.			

Mauritius

Mauritius is a small island nation in the Indian Ocean further east of Madagascar. The religious profile of Mauritius is different than the rest of Africa because of a considerable presence of Hindus. In 1900, Hindus formed 54.5 percent of the population. In the course of the twentieth century, their share has declined by nearly 10 percentage points to 44.2 percent in 2010. The share of Christians has remained more or less unchanged at around one-third. Muslims have improved their share from 10.9 to 16.9 percent. Besides these three communities, Mauritius has about 3

	1900	1970	2010
Total	378	824	1,299
%C	33.47	36.01	33.18
%M	10.89	15.99	16.86
%H	54.47	46.02	44.19
Total population in thousands.			

thousand each of Sikhs and Buddhists, about 17 thousand Chinese Religionists and nearly 25 thousand Agnostics or Atheists. There are also nearly twenty-four thousand Baha'is forming about 1.8 percent of the population. This makes Mauritius among the most religiously diverse regions of Africa.

Comoros, Mayotte, Seychelles and Reunion

These small islands off the coast of East Africa in the Indian Ocean have diverse religious demography. Comoros and Mayotte are more than 98 percent Muslim. Seychelles is 96 percent Christian. Reunion is nearly 88 percent Christian, but there are also about 4 percent Muslims and 4.5 percent Hindus there. Religious profile of Reunion has shown a significant change in the course of the twentieth century. The Island had nearly 53 percent Ethnic Religionists and 12 percent Muslims in 1900; the proportion of both has sharply declined to the advantage of the Christians. The proportion of Hindus has not changed significantly. Religious profile of Mayotte and Seychelles has remained more or less unchanged.

To sum up, Somalia in the Horn of Africa remains largely Muslim; Ethiopia and Eretria in the northeast and Tanzania and Mozambique in the centre-east have been divided between Christians and Muslims; Kenya, Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda in central East Africa and Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi in the southwest of East Africa have become largely Christian. Ethnic Religionists now retain a meaningful presence only in Madagascar and to some extent in Zambia and Zimbabwe.

South Africa

Population (in thousands) of different religions in South Africa

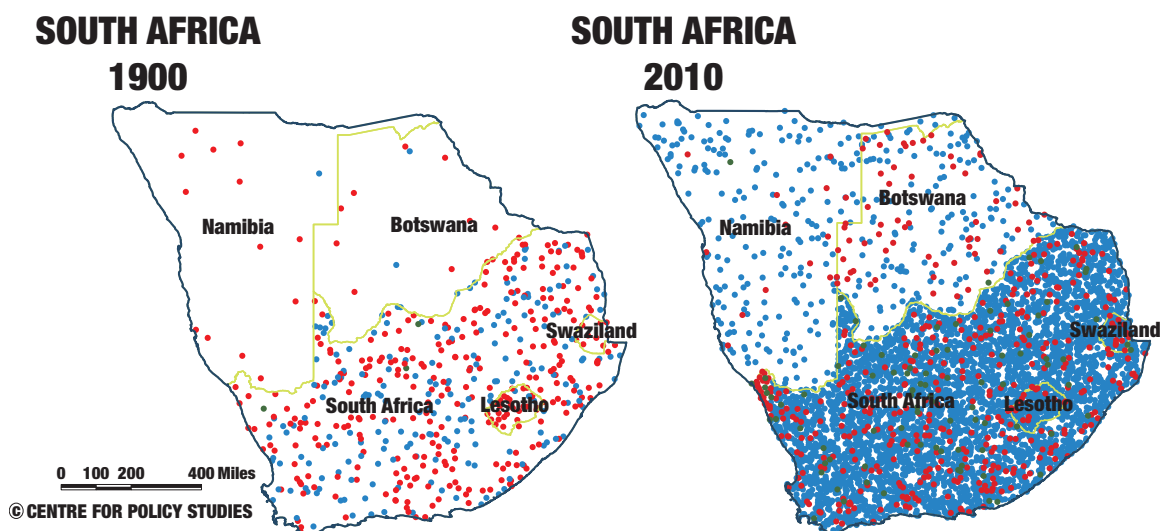
	1900	1970	1990	2000	2010
Total	5,547	25,000	39,113	46,886	57,780
Christian	2,056	19,258	31,935	38,964	47,597
Muslim	30	271	808	958	887
Ethnic R	3,376	4,706	4,323	4,382	4,568
Non R/Atheist	2	156	795	1,078	2,905
Others	83	609	1,252	1,504	1,823

Percent share of different religions in the population

Christian	37.07	77.03	81.65	83.10	82.38
Muslim	0.54	1.08	2.07	2.04	1.54
Ethnic R	60.86	18.83	11.05	9.35	7.91

South Africa (Region) is dominated by Christians

South Africa (region) is now largely Christian. At the beginning of the century, Christians already formed 37 percent of the population, a large proportion of them were probably European settlers. The remaining population mostly followed Ethnic Religions. Over the course of the century, the share of Christians has risen to more than 82 percent and that of Ethnic Religions has declined to less than 8 percent. Besides, the Christians and Ethnic Religionists, there are about 1.5 percent Muslims and 2 percent Hindus in the region. Nearly 5 percent of the population is Atheist or Non-Religious. There has been rapid rise in the proportion of such population in recent decades.



Each dot represents 10,000 persons. Blue: Christians, Green: Muslims, Red: Ethnic Religions

Republic of South Africa

Of about 58 million people in the region, 50 million are in the Republic of South Africa (RSA), which is the largest country of the region. In 1900, the proportion of Christians in RSA was relatively higher at around 41 percent, which has now risen to 82 percent. The proportion of Ethnic Religions has correspondingly declined from 57 to 7 percent.

Smaller countries of the region

There are only 4 other countries in the region, and all of them have fairly small populations. Lesotho, Namibia and Botswana have a population of around 2 million each; population of Swaziland is even lower at around 1 million. The share of Christians in Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland is higher than the average of the region at 92, 91 and 88 percent respectively. In Botswana, the proportion of Christians is lower at around 69 percent; Ethnic Religions still form nearly 30 percent of the population there, but their share is declining rapidly; their share has declined by 10 percentage points during the last decade of 2000-10 alone.

Distribution of Other Religions

Among 1.8 million others listed in South Africa (Region) in the Table above, 1.2 million are Hindus and 291 thousand Baha'is. Nearly all of the Hindus are in the Republic of South Africa (RAS) and they form 2.4 percent of the population of that country. Their share at the beginning of the century was nearer 1 percent. There are also about 11 thousand Sikhs and 2 thousand Jains in RAS. Of 291 thousand Baha'is, 239 thousand are in RAS where they form nearly half a percent of the population. There are also 16 thousand Baha'is in Botswana and 19 thousand in Lesotho forming 0.82 and 0.88 percent, respectively, of the population of those countries. There are about 160 thousand Buddhists, 34 thousand Chinese Religionists and 20 thousand Confucianists in South African region; nearly all of them are in RAS.

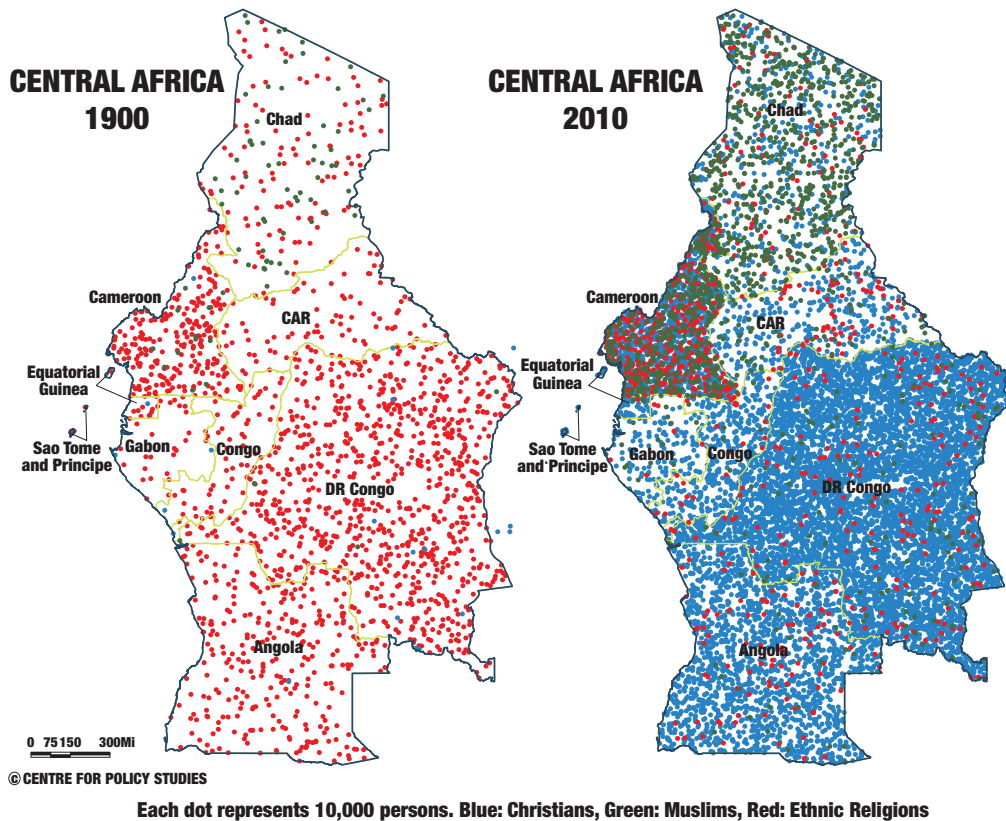
Central Africa

Population (in thousands) of different religions in East Africa

	1900	1970	1990	2000	2010
Total	18,080	40,103	70,379	95,652	126,688
Christian	193	30,290	56,648	78,075	104,578
Muslim	796	3,504	6,763	8,966	12,226
Ethnic R	17,091	6,098	6,228	7,530	8,429
Others	0	211	739	1,081	1,455
Percent share of different religions in the population					
Christian	1.07	75.53	80.49	81.62	82.55
Muslim	4.40	8.74	9.61	9.37	9.65
Ethnic R	94.53	15.20	8.85	7.87	6.65

Central Africa like South Africa has become Christian

Central Africa, like South Africa, has become more than 82 percent Christian. But unlike South Africa, it also has nearly 10 percent Muslims; the share of Ethnic Religionists is therefore relatively less at below 7 percent. Also unlike South Africa, Central Africa had almost no Christians in 1900. Nearly 95 percent of the population of the region were adherents of Ethnic Religions then; they have been largely converted to Christianity now. Among 1.45 million ‘others’ in the Table above, 837 thousand are Agnostics or Atheists, 474 thousand are Baha’is and 99 thousand Hindus. Almost all of the Hindus are in the Democratic Republic of Congo.



There are few Muslims in southern Central Africa

Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo and Congo in the southern part of Central Africa have even fewer Muslims; they form less than 1.5 percent of the population in all three of these. Presence of Christians is correspondingly higher at 93 percent in Angola, 95 percent in DR Congo and about 90 percent in Congo. Ethnic Religionists form less than five percent of the population in these countries. Decline in the share of Christians in Congo between 1970 and 2010 is because of the increase in the population of the non-Religious and Atheist people; they now form nearly 3 percent of the population of Congo. The islands of Sao Tome and Principe off the Central African coast in the Atlantic Ocean are 96 percent Christian. In 1900, there were only 3 percent Christians in Sao Tome and Principe.

Religious Profile of Angola, DR Congo and Congo

	1900	1970	2010
ANGOLA			
Total	2,970	5,588	19,082
%C	0.57	81.68	93.28
%E	99.43	18.21	4.62
DR CONGO			
Total	9,040	20,270	65,966
%C	1.38	91.61	95.01
%E	98.07	6.34	2.51
CONGO			
Total	540	1,263	2,220
%C	2.50	92.00	89.76
%E	97.50	6.70	4.77
Total population in thousands.			

Muslim share is somewhat higher in Gabon and CAR

Muslims have a share of 10 percent in Gabon and nearly 14 percent in Central African Republic. The share of Christians is around 85 percent in Gabon and 71 percent in CAR. In 1900, there were no Muslims in Gabon and Christians formed only 7.5 percent of the population. In CAR, there were hardly any Muslims or Christians and almost the whole population followed Ethnic Religions. The growth of both Muslims and Christians has been at the cost of Ethnic Religions who are reduced to just 3 percent in Gabon, but they still have a share of 14 percent in CAR. The data indicates that in this region there certainly has been some conversion from Ethnic Religions to Islam, though most of the conversion has been to Christianity. Equatorial Guinea, comprising a small enclave on the mainland between Gabon and Cameroon and several offshore islands, has 4 percent Muslims in its population of 7 lakhs in 2010; nearly 89 percent of the population of this small country is Christian. In 1900, there were no Muslims and only 5.4 percent Christians here.

Religious Profile of Gabon and CAR

	1900	1970	2010
GABON			
Total	280	504	1,505
%C	7.46	95.73	84.52
%M	0	0.79	10.23
%E	92.54	3.37	3.23
CAR			
Total	770	1,849	4,401
%C	0.01	64.05	71.32
%M	0.39	4.65	13.68
%E	99.60	31.09	14.04
Total population in thousands.			

Muslims dominate in Cameroon and Chad

Cameroon and Chad in the northern part of Central Africa have a higher presence of Muslims. Of 12.2 million Muslims in Central Africa, 10.2 million are in these two countries. In Cameroon, Muslims form 20 percent of the population; in Chad, they form a majority with 56 percent of the population. But they formed 36 percent of the population of Chad in 1900 also. There were few Christians in these two countries at the beginning of the century. They now form 58 percent of the population of Cameroon and 35 percent of Chad. Ethnic Religionists have been reduced to small minorities in both countries. In Cameroon, they still form about 21 percent of the population, in Chad their share is only 8.3 percent. At the beginning of the century, nearly the whole populations of Cameroon and two-thirds of Chad followed native Ethnic Religions.

Religious Profile of Chad and Cameroon

	1900	1970	2010
CAMEROON			
Total	2,620	6,614	19,599
%C	0.36	47.43	58.07
%M	5.00	20.04	20.04
%E	94.64	31.99	20.86
CHAD			
Total	1,700	3,652	11,227
%C	-	23.66	34.78
%M	36.00	49.34	55.92
%E	64.00	26.83	8.30
Total population in thousands.			

Baha'is in Central Africa

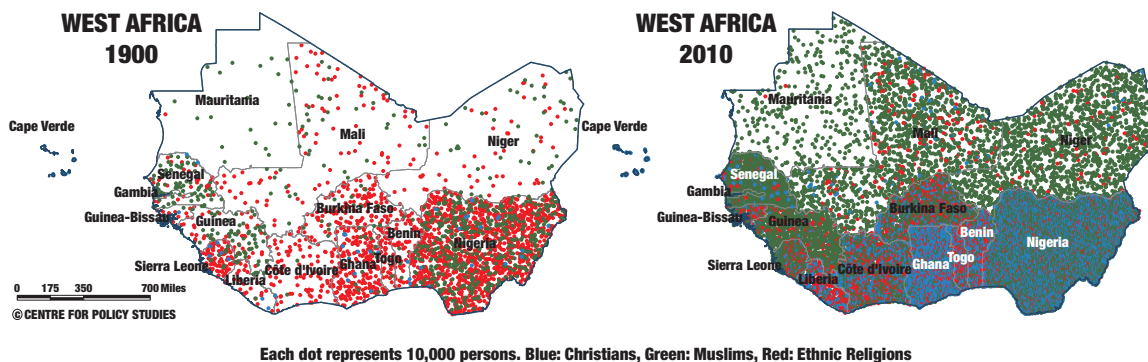
Of 474 thousand Baha'is in the region, 283 thousand are in DR Congo, where they form nearly half a percent of the population. Another 95 thousand Baha'is are in Chad, where they form 0.84 percent of the population.

West Africa

Population (in thousands) of different religions in West Africa					
	1900	1970	1990	2000	2010
Total	27,928	98,098	171,520	221,672	304,263
Christian	472	30,825	58,375	76,211	111,103
Muslim	7,050	43,905	80,305	104,550	155,229
Ethnic R	20,405	23,169	32,091	39,834	36,674
Non R/Atheist	0	140	570	844	953
Others	0	60	179	233	304
Percent share of different religions in the population					
Christian	1.69	31.42	34.03	34.38	36.52
Muslim	25.25	44.76	46.82	47.16	51.02
Ethnic R	73.06	23.62	18.71	17.97	12.05

West Africa is divided between Muslims and Christians

West Africa, like East Africa, is divided between Muslims and Christians. But, unlike in East Africa, Muslims form the majority here. They held a share of 25 percent of the population even at the beginning of the century; their share has now doubled to 51 percent. There were only a few Christians in West Africa in 1900; they now form more than 36 percent of the population. Ethnic Religionists formed 73 percent of the population in 1900 and have been reduced to only 12 percent now. There is a distinct difference in the religious profile of the northern and southern West Africa, which is clearly visible in the Map below and which we explore in some detail in the following.



Nigeria

Nigeria is the most populous country of Africa and accounts for more than half the population of West Africa. The country is nearly equally divided between Christians and Muslims, both forming around 46 percent of the population. They dominate geographically different regions. There are hardly any Muslims in the southern part of the country, and there are few Christians in the northern states of Nigeria. In the central and western parts of the country, both

Religious Profile of Nigeria			
	1900	1970	2010
Total	16,200	49,591	158,423
%C	1.09	43.81	46.46
%M	25.93	43.86	45.54
%E	72.99	12.04	7.67
Total population in thousands.			

Christians and Muslims have considerable presence. This religious profile of Nigeria makes the country an arena of contention between Muslims and Christians, which has been the cause of frequent Christian-Muslim rioting since the mid-fifties. The tensions have become more acute since the beginning of the twenty-first century with the federal government coming under the control of Christians and emergence of the Islamic fundamentalist movement of Boko Haram.

Countries to the west of Nigeria

Many of the countries to the west of Nigeria—including Benin, Togo, Burkino Faso, Cote d’Ivoire Liberia and Guinea Bissau—still have a considerable presence of the Ethnic Religionists. In all of these six countries they have a share of about a quarter or more. In Liberia and Guinea Bissau, they form nearly 42 percent of the population. The remaining population of these countries is divided between Christians and Muslims. In Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire and Guinea Bissau, Muslims share is higher than that of Christians. In Benin, Togo and Liberia, Christians outnumber the Muslims. In Liberia, the share of Muslims has somewhat declined between 1970 and 2010. As in much of Africa, religious demography of these countries continues to be in transition, with both Christians and Muslims trying to increase their numbers and share in the populations.

Religious Profile of countries to the west of Nigeria

	BENIN			TOGO		
	1900	1970	2010	1900	1970	2010
Total	620	2,705	8,850	470	2,020	6,028
%C	1.18	19.04	43.77	0.85	29.50	46.96
%M	7.02	13.90	25.46	4.04	12.81	18.35
%E	91.81	66.88	30.38	95.11	57.54	33.88
	BURKINA FASO			COTE D’IVOIRE		
	1900	1970	2010	1900	1970	2010
Total	1,400	5,424	16,469	1,000	5,515	19,738
%C	0.00	8.35	22.41	0.07	28.05	34.31
%M	10.00	34.73	53.69	5.00	22.77	40.58
%E	90.00	55.75	23.38	94.93	49.05	24.51
	LIBERIA			GUINEA BISSAU		
	1900	1970	2010	1900	1970	2010
Total	310	1,385	3,994	120	525	1,515
%C	10.58	31.04	40.54	4.00	12.72	12.21
%M	2.00	18.91	16.05	15.00	35.00	44.49
%E	87.42	49.81	41.64	81.00	52.17	41.98

Population in thousands.

Ghana and Sierra Leone

While counting the countries to the west of Nigeria, we left out Ghana and Sierra Leone. In Ghana, the second most populous country of West Africa, Christians now form an overwhelming 64 percent of the population. The share of Muslims is only 20 percent. In Sierra Leone, on the other hand, Muslims form nearly 65 percent of the population, with Christians having a much smaller share of only 13 percent. Like other countries of the region, the two still have significant presence of Ethnic Religionists; they have a share of about 16 percent in Ghana and more than 20 percent in Sierra Leone.

Religious Profile of Ghana and Sierra Leone

	GHANA		
	1900	1970	2010
Total	2,200	8,612	24,392
%C	4.68	52.66	63.96
%M	5.00	13.89	19.85
%E	90.32	33.24	15.68
	SIERRA LEONE		
	1900	1970	2010
Total	1,026	2,656	5,868
%C	4.56	8.16	13.26
%M	10.00	38.07	64.64
%E	85.44	53.70	20.57

Population in thousands.

Cape Verde and St Helena

The Island nation of Cape Verde, lying in the Atlantic Ocean off the West Africa coast, is a country of about half a million people, 95 percent of whom are Christians. There are also about 14 thousand Muslims and 5.4 thousand followers of African Ethnic Religions. The island of St Helena, with a population of only 4 thousand, is also 95 percent Christian, with the remaining population being non-Religious or Atheist.

Northern West Africa

Countries lying to the north of Nigeria—Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia and Guinea—are predominantly Muslim. Niger is more than 95 percent Muslim and the remaining population is mostly of Ethnic Religionists. Christians have a negligibly small presence there. In 1900, 55 percent of the population followed Ethnic Religions; apparently they have all been converted to Islam. Mali is 87 percent Muslim; there are also 9.5 percent Ethnic Religionists there and Christian's form only 3 percent of the population. Mauritania is 99 percent Muslim; their share was nearly 98 percent in 1900 also. Senegal is 91 percent Muslim; it also was nearly 70 percent Muslim in 1900. Gambia is about 89 percent Muslim; their share was 81 percent in 1900. Guinea is 85 percent Muslim; it still has about 11 percent Ethnic Religionists. Thus, these countries of northern West Africa, like those of North Africa, seem to have been part of the Muslim world for long.

	NIGER			MALI		
	1900	1970	2010	1900	1970	2010
Total	910	4,165	15,512	1,300	5,484	15,370
%C	0.00	0.45	0.35	0.05	1.55	3.24
%M	45.05	85.96	95.41	30.02	78.01	87.14
%E	54.95	13.57	4.11	69.92	20.42	9.50
	MAURITANIA			SENEGAL		
Total	220	1,221	3,460	1,000	4,158	12,434
%C	0.02	0.51	0.26	1.84	5.40	5.38
%M	97.70	99.34	99.10	69.96	86.94	90.76
%E	2.27	0.08	0.52	28.20	7.60	3.47
	GAMBIA			GUINEA		
Total	89	464	1,728	990	3,900	9,982
%C	4.16	3.13	4.35	0.18	1.42	3.66
%M	81.03	84.02	88.72	58.00	67.98	84.80
%E	14.72	11.99	5.53	41.82	30.47	11.26

Population in thousands.

Other Religions in West Africa

West Africa has about 10 thousand Hindus. Half of them are in Ghana and another 3 thousand in Sierra Leone. There are also about 1.6 thousand Hindus in Cote d'Ivoire; their number in that country has sharply declined from 8.3 thousand in 2000. There are also 3.7 thousand Sikhs; all of them are in Niger. There are about 30 thousand Buddhists in the region; of them, 8.5 thousand are in Nigeria, about 10 thousand in Cote d'Ivoire and 9 thousand in Guinea. Of 5.8 thousand Chinese Religionists in the region, 4.7 thousand are in Nigeria. The region has nearly 200 thousand Baha'is; they are spread widely through the various countries of the region. There are also 56 thousand 'New Religionists'; of them, 16 thousand are in Nigeria and 27 thousand in Ghana. Of 953 thousand non-Religionists and Atheists, about half are in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

African continent

1. Religious profile of Africa has been transformed in the course of the twentieth century.
2. At the beginning of the century, 58 percent of the population of Africa followed native Ethnic Religions; Muslims had a share of 32 percent in the population and less than 10 percent of the people were Christian. In 2010, Ethnic Religions have been reduced to less than 9 percent of the population, while the share of Christians has risen spectacularly to

48 percent and Muslims have added 10 percentage points to their share and now form 42 percent of the population.

3. As seen in the maps of the religious profile of the continent presented in the Appendix below, the continent now has a distinct north south divide on the basis of religion. Northern parts of Africa are largely Muslim and the southern parts largely Christian, while the countries in the central parts are divided between the two.

North Africa

4. North Africa is largely Muslim. Population of this region was 82 percent Muslim in 1900; it is 89 percent Muslim now. The share of Christians has declined slightly from 9.5 to 8 percent and that of Ethnic Religionists sharply from 7.4 to 2.1 percent.

5. Christians in North Africa are largely confined to Egypt, where they form about 10 percent of the population. Their share in Egypt in 1900 was around 18 percent. In 1900, Christians also had a presence of about 12 percent in Algeria, but they were mostly European colonisers who left the country at the time of Independence in the early 1960s.

6. The most remarkable change that has occurred in this part of Africa is that of the Christianisation of South Sudan, which has been recently carved out from Sudan as a separate Christian majority country after protracted and intense bloodshed.

7. Christians now form 60 percent of the population of South Sudan; they had hardly any presence here in 1900 and even in 1970, their share was only about 22 percent. The country is now counted as part of East Africa, where Christians have a significant presence, rather than North Africa, which is largely Muslim.

East Africa

8. East Africa has experienced large-scale conversion during the twentieth century. Consequently, the region is now 66 percent Christian and 22 percent Muslim; the share of the two communities in 1900 was 19 and 12 percent, respectively.

9. In 1990, more than 70 percent of the population of East Africa followed Ethnic Religions; their share is now down to less than 11 percent.

10. Muslims in East Africa have a significant presence only in Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea in the northeast and in Tanzania in the south.

11. Kenya and Uganda in central East Africa and Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi in the south have turned mostly Christian.

12. Ethnic Religions retain a considerable presence only in Mozambique and Madagascar, but Christians form a majority of the population in these countries also.

South Africa

13. South Africa is now 82 percent Christian; they had a share of 37 percent in 1900 also. There are not many Muslims in this region and the Ethnic Religionists have been mostly converted.

Central Africa

14. In 1900, there were not many Christians or Muslims in Central Africa. The region is now 82 percent Christian. There are also 10 percent Muslims, but they are mostly confined to Chad and Cameroon.

West Africa

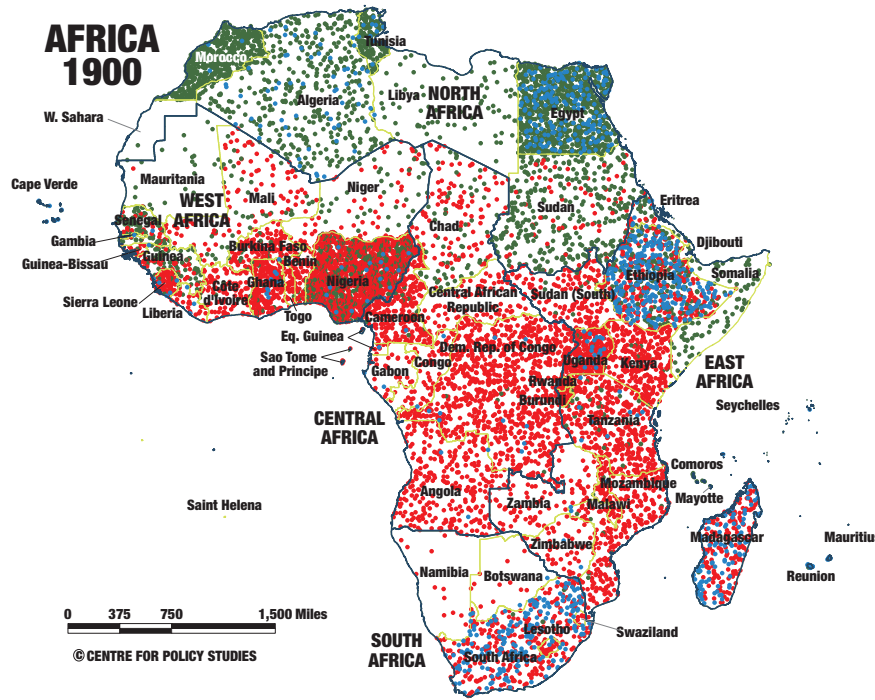
15. West Africa is divided between Muslims and Christians. The northern part of West Africa is largely Muslim, while the southern part is mostly Christian.

16. Nigeria, the largest country of Africa, is equally divided between Muslims and Christians with both forming around 46 percent of the population. Christians dominate the north and Muslims dominate the south of Nigeria.

17. Ethnic Religionists, who formed more than 70 percent of the population in 1900, are now left with a significant presence only in some of the smaller countries in the northwest part of West Africa.

18. The religious transformation of Africa has not only been rapid and drastic, it has also been contentious in many countries where Christianity and Islam have faced each other in their quest for conversions. Such conflicts have been the most intense in the eastern, central and western parts of Africa, where the dominance of either of the two is not yet fully established. The new religious contention has exacerbated and given a sharper edge to the pre-existing ethnic differences in the continent. The global enterprise of religious conversion has thus brought much warfare and bloodshed in its wake, which still continues unabated in many parts of the continent.

Appendix: Maps of the Religious Profile of Africa 1900 and 2010



Each dot represents 10,000 persons. Blue: Christians, Green: Muslims, Red: Ethnic Religions



Each dot represents 10,000 persons. Blue: Christians, Green: Muslims, Red: Ethnic Religions