

The Numerical Distribution of Muslims in Africa

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Abstract

This quantitative research study shows the numbers and percentages of Muslims in Africa, relative to Christians and Africans who continue to practice their traditional religions, within the continent's five regions (viz., Eastern, Middle, Northern, Southern, and Western), as of July 2009. It also presents religious breakdowns for those nations that are currently or at one time were partly or fully colonized by European powers. The statistics show that Islam and Christianity combined have converted over 80 percent of all Africans and that the proportion of Africans on the continent who practice traditional or indigenous religions has now declined to less than 12 percent.

Introduction/Background

Islam, like Christianity, continues to have an immense influence or impact in Africa. As the data below reveals, Africa contained over 400 million Muslims by July 2009, which makes it the only continent on which Muslims represent the largest proportion of all world religions. Islam's impact on Africans is not limited only to the number or percentage of its adherents; its

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real impact, like that of Christianity, lies in its economic, educational, social, and political influences on their everyday activities.¹

For example, as one study on Islam's influence in Senegal points out: "Currently 96% of the Senegalese population is Muslim and Islam remains a powerful force in politics, society, and family dynamics."² In the same study, which examines Islam's impact on HIV/AIDS prevention, Gilbert found that Senegal's low HIV/AIDS rate of 0.9% in a 2006 report is largely due to Islam: "Increased levels of circumcision, reduced frequency of intoxication, and high valuation of premarital abstinence and marital fidelity are all examples of how Muslim values can result in lower risk behaviors."³ In an article on transnational Islamic non-governmental organizations in Chad, Kaag remarks:

The first transnational Islamic NGOs were established at the end of the 1970s ... They based themselves on an Islamic understanding of solidarity that comprised three elements: *ighatha* "humanitarian relief," *da'wa* "the call or invitation to Islam," and *jihad* in the sense of armed support of the Islamic cause.... In Africa, where they have been active since the 1980s, they have mainly focused on *ighatha* and *da'wa*.⁴

Among the findings in a study by Yeatman and Trinitapoli on the relationship between religion and family planning in rural Malawi is that:

[d]enominational patterns of contraceptive use among women differ dramatically from the stated positions of leaders in these traditions. Both ever use and current use of modern family planning are highest among Catholics, New Mission Protestants, and Mission Protestants, and lowest among Muslims.⁵

Writing on the Shari`ah's impact in northern Nigeria, Last states that: "Although the shari'a sentences of stoning, amputation and execution have attracted worldwide publicity, they have very rarely been carried out."⁶ One must note that he did not say that the sentences have never been carried out. He adds that: "Only three domains are seriously affected: women in public (their dress, their proximity to unrelated men – in conversation, for example, or in public transport); alcohol and non-military music and singing."⁷ According to de Montclos:

Islam in the Sahel is now perceived by many Africans as a tool of repression when compared to Christianity, which was the oppressor's religion during the European colonization. Thus in Southern Sudan today, conversion to Christianity is both the result of forced Islamization, dissatisfac-

tion with the old religions, and attraction to churches because of the role they play in education and providing humanitarian aid.⁸

Islam has also been utilized to stop rapid westernization in Africa, especially in North Africa. Writing on *Political Islam in North Africa*, Henry points out that:

In all of its many forms, ranging from reformist movements to transnational jihad, against “far” as well “near” enemies, political Islam must be viewed as a series of responses to the penetration of Western ideas and practices into Muslim societies; and North Africa, geographically closer to the European imperial powers, suffered the most penetration and has exhibited the greatest variety of responses over the past century.⁹

These selected examples show that Islam has enormous influence over the lives of hundreds of millions of Africans in many different ways. The primary purpose of this article, however, is to present the most recent estimates of the total numbers and percentages of Muslims in Africa as a whole and in its five regions (viz., Eastern, Middle, Northern, Southern, and Western). The paper also presents estimates of the total numbers and percentages of Muslims in the current and former African nations that were at one time partly or fully colonized by Belgium, France, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

For a better understanding of these religious statistics, the article also presents estimates of the total numbers and percentages of Christians and Africans who continue to practice their traditional or indigenous religions. This information is very useful to a variety of individuals, scholars and students, governments, NGOs, and other organizations. For example, in two reports prepared in May and August 2008 by Hussein D. Hassan, the U.S. Congressional Research Service, which conducts and produces research reports for members and committees in both the House of Representatives and Senate, extracted and utilized an entire table of the statistical distribution of Christians, Muslims, and Africans who practice traditional religions as of July 2001 from a study by this author. This article is updating the former one, which was entitled “The Spread of Christianity and Islam in Africa: A Survey and Analysis of the Numbers and Percentages of Christians, Muslims and Those Who Practice Indigenous Religions.”¹⁰ In other words, it contains data as of July 2009 and, at a time when Africa’s total population is just three million short of one billion, will be very useful to the many stakeholders who are interested in the spread of foreign religions there.

This article begins with the methodology utilized to research, compile, and compute the respective numbers and percentages. My methodology builds on the one used in the above-cited 2005 publication. I then present the distributions in numbers and percentages as of July 2009 for the entire continent, its five regions, and for the current and former African nations that were once partly or fully colonized by former European powers. Any particular similarities or differences will be highlighted, and a comparison will also be made to the 2005 study (which presents 2001 data) to see if there have been any major changes in the numbers and percentages in the past eight years.

Data Source, Reliability, and Methodology

As mentioned above, this section builds on my article published in *The Western Journal of Black Studies*.¹¹ Below is an explanation with new information added as to how I researched, compiled, and computed the religious statistics.

The continued challenge or difficulty with gathering data on the different religious communities in Africa and the world is their accuracy. How reliable are they? Moreover, one might tend to question the procedure or methodology of how such estimates are compiled and computed. For example, writing on the Muslim population's increase in sub-Saharan Africa, de Montclos notes: "In Africa South of the Sahara, at least, we have no scientific measurement of the progression of Islam. For instance, there is no reliable data to confirm that the number of Muslims is growing faster than the whole population."¹²

Nevertheless, there are organizations or institutions that provide estimates of religious adherents in their annual publications. I carefully studied some of their annual publications to find out whether or not they shared identical estimates on religion. The publications are: the *Encyclopedia Britannica Book 2003 of the Year*, the *2002 New York Times Almanac*, the *2002 World Almanac and Book of Facts*, the *2001 World Christian Encyclopedia* (2d ed.), and the *2001 United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) World Factbook*.

After studying these five publications carefully, I discovered that three of them (viz., the *New York Times Almanac*, the *World Almanac and Book of Facts*, and the *CIA World Factbook*) present almost identical estimates on the religious adherents in various countries. The *Encyclopedia Britannica*'s figures are not significantly different from the first three. Those presented in the *World Christian Encyclopedia* are significantly higher, however, especially for Christians, than they are in the other four publications. For exam-

ple, the *2001 World Christian Encyclopedia* (2d ed.) asserts that as of mid-2000 there were an estimated 49 million Christians and 568,656 Muslims in the Democratic Republic of Congo.¹³ But the *2002 New York Times Almanac* shows that as of 2001 there were 42.9 million (80%) Christians and 5.36 million (10%) Muslims in the same country.¹⁴

Although the *New York Times Almanac*, the *World Almanac and Book of Facts*, and the *CIA World Factbook* share almost identical estimates of religious breakdowns in the countries studied, for this study I decided to utilize the *2002 New York Times Almanac* because its data on the breakdown of African nations were presented in percentages of persons of particular religious persuasions compared to the country's total population. While studying the religious statistics in the sources, however, I found that none of them provided complete data for all of Africa's countries and territories.

This is one of the challenges that researchers continue to confront in attempting to determine the numbers of the different religious adherents in countries across the world. As a result, when the *2002 New York Times Almanac* has no data for a particular country, I utilized data from one of the other publications that have such data. For example, as this source does not give a complete breakdown or actual estimates for Gabon, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Namibia, and Zambia, I decided to use the estimates presented in the *Encyclopedia Britannica Book 2003 of the Year*.

My reason for doing so is that in one instance, the *2002 New York Times Almanac* presented data for Zambia in ranges (Christians 50-75% and Muslims and Hindus 24-49%).¹⁵ It is difficult to convert such figures to actual numbers. But the *Encyclopedia Britannica 2003 Book of the Year* presented the following breakdown of religions for Zambia: "Christian 47.8%, Traditional Beliefs 27%, Muslim 1.0% and Other 24.2%."¹⁶ Another example concerned Equatorial Guinea, for which the *2002 New York Times Almanac* had no estimates and only claimed that it is: "Nominally Christian and predominantly Roman Catholic, pagan practices."¹⁷ But the *Encyclopedia Britannica 2003 Book of the Year* presented the following figures: "Roman Catholic 80.1%, Muslim 4.0%, African Christian 3.7%, Protestant 3.1%, Other 9.1%."¹⁸

The *2002 New York Times Almanac* used 2001 country population estimates for most of the world's countries. But for a number of countries (viz., Mayotte, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Reunion, Saint Helena, Seychelles, Western Sahara, Zambia, and Zimbabwe), it presented mostly 2000 population estimates and, in one instance (Senegal), 1999 population estimates. I therefore replaced those figures with the 2001 population estimates in the *2001 CIA World Factbook*; however, I used the actual estimates in percent-

ages of the various groups in African countries in the *2002 New York Times Almanac*. Those actual estimates in percentages of religious groups in Africa were, for the most part, consistent in annual publications. For example, the *New York Times Almanac* for both 2002 and 2004 presented the following estimates of religious groups in Nigeria: “50% Muslim, 40% Christian, 10% indigenous beliefs.”¹⁹

The study attempts to present all of the estimated population figures as of July 2001. So even though the estimates presented in percentages for this study in the *Encyclopedia Britannica 2003 Book of the Year* are for different years (e.g., figures for Eritrea, Gabon, Namibia, and Niger are 2000 estimates), I utilized 2001 population figures to convert those percentages to actual numbers, so that the findings could be presented as of July 2001.

This now brings me to the accuracy and reliability of these religious statistics. There are no certain guarantees that any of them are accurate or completely reliable. Even in the United States, where researchers are well trained and have sufficient research funds, statistics of various religious groups are not completely reliable. For figures of the three main religious groups in Africa cited above, the *Encyclopedia Britannica 2003 Book of the Year* cautioned readers:

As defined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a person’s religion is what he or she says it is. Totals are enumerated for each of the world’s 238 countries following the methodology of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2d edn. (2001) and *World Christian Trends* (2001), using recent censuses, polls, surveys, reports, websites, literature, and other data.²⁰

It also defines religious affiliation as the “[d]istribution of nominal religionists, whether practicing or not, as a percentage of total population. This usually assigns to children the religion of their parents.”²¹ In Africa, for instance, the fact that at least 80 percent of the population still lives in rural areas makes it difficult to get an accurate estimate of the numbers and percentages of Christians, Muslims, and Africans who practice traditional religions. Nevertheless, as these annual almanacs and books of facts have shown, it is still necessary to attempt to come up with some kind of estimates related to the different kinds of religions practiced in countries across the world in order to contribute to our understanding of them.

Methodology

Building on the methodology of the above-mentioned 2005 publication, I decided to utilize the data in the *2008 CIA World Factbook* because its sta-

tistics related to Africa's various religious groups are almost identical to those mentioned in the *New York Times Almanac*. The *CIA World Factbook* presented the religious breakdowns of the nations cited, including the African nations, in percentages that, as noted above, were converted to raw numbers and then to percentages for the various groupings. For some of the nations it also gave the year as to when the data were published; however, for the majority of the nations it did not do so, thereby suggesting that the estimates are current.

For those nations in the *CIA World Factbook* without uniform religious breakdowns or missing estimates, I utilized data from the *Encyclopedia Britannica 2003 Book of the Year* or the *2008 New York Times Almanac*. Below are the nations whose data were extracted from these two sources, as well as from the *2001 CIA World Factbook*. In the case of Tanzania, because it is comprised of the mainland and Zanzibar, a calculation was made so that religious estimates could be properly distributed. Let us go over these nations below:

1. **Eritrea:** Religion estimates are based on data in the *Encyclopedia Britannica 2003 Book of the Year* (Eritrea: Christians 50.5%, Muslims 44.7%, and other 4.8%).²²
2. **Tanzania:** The *2008 CIA World Factbook* presented percentages of its various religions only for the mainland (45% Christians, 35% Muslims, 20% indigenous beliefs). For Zanzibar, the country's other half, this source noted that it is "almost all Muslim." I therefore decided to subtract its population, which, according to a report by the Zanzibar AIDS Commission, was 1,144,000 in 2006.²³ This figure was subtracted from Tanzania's total population, which, as of July 2009, was 41,048,532. I then converted the provided percentages using the 39,904,532 figure and adding Zanzibar's 1,144,000 population to the Muslim total.
3. **Zambia:** Religion estimates are based on data in the *Encyclopedia Britannica 2003 Book of the Year* (Zambia: Christians 47.8%, Traditional beliefs 27%, Muslims 1% and other 24.2%).²⁴
4. **Zimbabwe:** The data show that the Christian population is a mix of Africans who incorporate their traditional religious beliefs and ceremonies within their Christian practice.
5. **The Democratic Republic of Congo:** The percentages and numbers for the "Other" and some of the Christian categories include traditional religions in their ceremonies or religious practices.

6. **Equatorial Guinea:** Religion estimates are based on data in the *Encyclopedia Britannica 2003 Book of the Year* (Equatorial Guinea: Christian 86.9%, Muslim 4%, and other 9.1%).²⁵
7. **Gabon:** These percentages are based on data presented in the *Encyclopedia Britannica 2003 Book of the Year*.²⁶ The percentages from the *CIA World Factbook* for the various religions did not add up to 100 percent. For example, the data show 1.7% Indigenous religions, 3.1% Muslims, and 90.6% Christians, for a total of 95.4%, leaving out 4.6% (69,690 people). As of July 2009, Gabon's total population is 1,514,993.
8. **Namibia:** The data comes from the *Encyclopedia Britannica 2003 Book of the Year* (Namibia: Christian 76%, Traditional beliefs 6%, and other 18%).²⁷
9. **Cape Verde:** The data in the *2008 CIA World Factbook* show that all (100%) of its population is Christian.
10. **Cote d'Ivoire:** The data presented in the *2008 CIA World Factbook* do not add up to 100 percent. For example, they show 11.9% Indigenous beliefs, 38.6% Muslims, 32.8% Christians, and 16% No religions for a total of 99.3 percent. In July 2009, Cote d'Ivoire's total population was estimated at 20,617,068, leaving out .7% (144,319) of the population.
11. **Niger:** The religious breakdown is based on estimates in the *Encyclopedia Britannica 2003 Book of the Year*: Muslims 90.7%, Traditional beliefs 8.7%, Christians 0.5%, and Other 0.1 percent.²⁸
12. **Mozambique:** The data, which is from both the *2008 New York Times Almanac* and the *2001 CIA World Factbook*,²⁹ shows the same estimates of 50% Indigenous religions, 20% Muslims, and 30% Christians.

Finally, although the *2008 CIA World Factbook* presented uniform or consistent religious affiliation data for all of the African nations not listed above, for several of them it presented different years as to when those estimates were reported. The nations and the years are Ethiopia (1994), Malawi (1998), Mauritius (2000), Reunion (1995), Rwanda (2001), Seychelles (2002), Uganda (2002), Angola (1998), Chad (1993), Sao Tome & Principe (2001), Botswana (2001), South Africa (2001), Benin (2002), and Cote d'Ivoire (2008). The *2006 CIA World Factbook's* population estimate for Reunion is as of July 2006, and the religious numbers for this country show 86% Christians and the remaining 14% "Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist," which was then placed in the category of "other religions."

All of the data were rechecked one last time on the *2008 CIA World Factbook* website on 29 March 2009. Although the website showed *2008*

CIA World Factbook, the total population estimates for the countries on 29 March 2009 were as of July 2009.

Classification of Regions of Africa and Current and Former African Colonies of European Powers

Researchers at government agencies, international organizations, universities, foundations, and major newspapers utilize several different classifications of Africa's regions because there is no internationally sanctioned one. The legacy of colonialism is primarily responsible for this fact.³¹ For this study, I utilized the classification of the five regions (see appendix) given by the United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. According to its classification of the world's regions, Africa is comprised of fifty-seven countries. As regards the basis for its groupings of Africa's regions, the United Nations cautions that:

The macro geographical regions are arranged to the extent possible according to continents. Within these groupings more detailed component geographical regions are shown ... The designations employed and the presentation of material at this site do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The assignment of countries or areas to specific groupings is for statistical convenience and does not imply any assumption regarding political or other affiliation of countries or territories by the United Nations.³¹

The second type of classification, African countries that are currently or were partly or fully colonized (with source data derived from the *2002 New York Times Almanac*)³² by European powers, is grouped together to see if there are any similarities or contrasts among its members in terms of the numbers and percentages of Christians, Muslims, and Africans who practice indigenous religions. Three nations on the list are not yet independent: Reunion and Mayotte, both located in the Indian Ocean and under French control, and Saint Helena, located in the South Atlantic Ocean and under British control.

Many scholars and others have noted that the European countries that colonized Africa brought their religions with them. As a result, a religious breakdown of Africa's current and former British, French, Belgian, and Portuguese colonies will contribute to our understanding of their religious makeup. A religious breakdown was also conducted for another group of African countries classified by this study as "other." Let us now carefully

examine the breakdowns in numbers and percentages of Christians, Muslims, and Africans who continue to practice indigenous religions on the continent in the beginning of the twenty-first century.

THE NUMERICAL DISTRIBUTION OF MUSLIMS, CHRISTIANS, AND THOSE WHO PRACTICE INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS IN AFRICA. Kaba's 2005 study noted that 100,000 years ago an estimated 1 million people inhabited the planet and that 900,000 of them lived in Africa. This means that they practiced their own religions, since Islam and Christianity did not exist at that time. This study also quoted Mazrui as saying that: "Long before the religion of the crescent or the religion of the cross arrived on the African continent, Africa was at worship, its sons and daughters were at prayer."³³

But by 2009 the majority of the world's population resides outside of Africa and over 80% of all Africans are either Muslim or Christian. In July 2008, of the world's 6.7 billion people, only 972 million (14.5%) lived in Africa. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Christians and Muslims comprised over 54.33% of the world's population.³⁴ According to the *2008 CIA World Factbook*, as of 2007 the world's religious breakdown is as follows: "Christians 33.32% (of which Roman Catholics 16.99%, Protestants 5.78%, Orthodox 3.53%, Anglicans 1.25%), Muslims 21.01%, Hindus 13.26%, Buddhists 5.84%, Sikhs 0.35%, Jews 0.23%, Baha'is 0.12%, other religions 11.78%, non-religious 11.77%, atheists 2.32% (2007 est)."³⁵

Africa has continued to be a big contributor to the large number of Muslims and Christians in the world. In the past century, while these two populations have increased substantially, the total number of Africans who practice indigenous religions has increased in absolute numbers but declined in proportion to the continent's total population. For example: "Muslims in 1900 outnumbered Christians by a ratio of 4:1 ... In 1962 when Africa had largely slipped out of colonial control, there were about 60 million Christians, with Muslims at about 145 million..."³⁶

Ellingwood noted that a 1972 work estimated: "Probably a quarter of the Muslims of the world live in Africa. Probably some 70 million Muslims live south of the Sahara"³⁷ and that "[j]ust since 1965, the Christian population of Africa has risen from around a quarter of the continental total to about 46 percent, stunning growth for such a short period."³⁸ According to Mazrui:

Between 1931 and 1951 the number of Muslims in the whole of Africa had risen from 40 million to 80 million in comparison with a Roman Catholic rise from 5 million to 15 million. ... Of the total Black population estimated at the time as being 130 million in Africa south of the Sahara, 28 million were Muslim, 13 million were Catholics, 4 million were Protestants

and 85 million still followed their own indigenous religions, even though some of these traditionalists were nominally Muslim or Christian. Islam in Africa as a whole, including Arab Africa, commanded the allegiance of approximately 40 per cent of the continent's population.³⁹

According to Ellis and Haar:

Asian religions have also established roots in various parts of the continent, as have a great variety of new religious movements. There are also self-conscious revivals of some indigenous religions. Africa's history of rather flexible religious belief runs up against the dogmatic nature of religions that have scriptures, yet Africans remain generally tolerant in religious matters.⁴⁰

Tables 1A and 1B show the breakdowns in numbers and percentages of Muslims, Christians, and those who practice indigenous and other religions in Africa in July 2001 and July 2009. As of July 2001, Muslims comprised 371.4 million (45.1%) of Africa's total 823.4 million people. But in July 2009, while the total Muslim population increased in absolute numbers to 434.74 million, its proportion declined to 43.6% of the continent's 997 million people. In fact, as regards its total population, Africa has the highest proportion of Muslims of any continent; in 2007 this figure represented 31% of the world's 1.41 billion Muslims. The continent's total Christian population increased significantly both in terms of absolute numbers and percentages. As of July 2001, there were 304.31 million Christians in Africa, 36.9% of its 823.4 million people; by July 2009, the Christian population had increased to 411.13 million, 41.2% of its 997 million people. This represents a 4.3% increase from July 2001 to July 2009.

The total number and percentage of Africans who practice indigenous religions declined significantly from July 2001 to July 2009. In July 2001, an estimated 137.84 million Africans practiced indigenous religions, 16.7% of Africa's 823.4 million people. But by July 2009, however, this number had declined to 117.73 million, only 11.8% of the continent's 997 million people. The religious group categorized as "Other" comprised 9.8 million (1.2%) people in July 2001 and increased to 19.4 million (1.9%) people in July 2009.

Hindus and Jews are among those listed in the "Other" category. For example, according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica 2003 Book of the Year*, Africa contained an estimated 2.4 million Hindus in mid-2002.⁴¹ Finally, although table 1A shows that there were zero Africans in Africa who practiced or believed in no religions in July 2001, this is because the figures were presented in percentages, thus making the small number of people who practice no religion too small to constitute a percentage. However, according to

figures presented in the *Encyclopedia Britannica 2003 Book of the Year*, there were an estimated 445,000 atheists in Africa as of mid-2002,⁴² and in July 2009, table 1B shows that 14 million people (1.4%) practiced or had no religion.

Tables 1A and 1B: Religious Breakdowns for the Five Regions of Africa, July 2001 and July 2009 (N=57 Countries/Territories)

Table 1A 2001 Regions	Indigenous Religions	Muslim Population	Christian Population	Other Religions	No Religion Population	Total
Eastern Africa	52,114,073	59,091,873	135,194,880	6,058,251	0	252,459,077
Middle Africa	21,001,056	13,528,373	61,821,241	437,688	0	96,788,358
Northern Africa	9,020,093	167,131,245	6,410,368	632,920	0	183,194,626
Southern Africa	14,089,672	871,722	34,202,095	1,087,807	0	50,251,296
Western Africa	41,617,613	130,835,929	66,685,296	1,601,876	0	240,740,714
Total	137,842,507	371,459,142	304,313,880	9,818,542	0	823,434,071
Percent of Total	16.7	45.1	36.9	1.2	0.0	99.9

Table 1B 2009
Regions

Eastern Africa	51,367,087	73,995,889	181,876,937	7,768,746	1,088,589	316,097,247
Middle Africa	17,852,344	16,959,205	79,182,314	7,160,733	361,465	121,516,061
Northern Africa	10,271,956	188,581,600	10,850,994	705,677	0	210,410,227
Southern Africa	672,137	848,178	44,839,062	2,230,338	7,817,046	56,406,761
Western Africa	37,562,542	154,359,098	94,381,359	1,544,867	4,752,513	292,600,379
Total	117,726,066	434,743,970	411,130,666	19,410,361	14,019,613	997,030,675
Percent of Total	11.8	43.6	41.2	1.9	1.4	99.9

Source: Compiled and calculated by author based on data in the *2008 CIA World Factbook*. See the methodology section for all technical explanations.

Below are the tables and explanations for the 2009 religious breakdowns of Africa's five regions as well as the religious breakdowns of the current and former colonies of the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, and Portugal.

EASTERN AFRICA: JULY 2009 AND JULY 2001. According to table 2, as of July 2009 Christians had both the highest absolute number and highest percentage in Eastern Africa. Of the region's 310.1 million people in July 2009, Christians accounted for 181.9 million (57.5%) people. Muslims had the second largest population, with 74 million (23.4%), followed by Africans who practice indigenous religions (51.4 million [16.3%]), other religions (7.8 million [2.5%]), and no religion (1.1 million [0.3%]) (table 2).

In July 2001, Christians accounted for 135.2 million (53.5%) of Eastern Africa's 252.5 million people. There were 59.1 million (23.4%) Muslims,

52.11 million (21%) people who practiced indigenous religions, 6.1 million people who practiced other religions, and zero percent who practiced no religion.⁴³

Table 2: Religious Breakdowns for the Countries of Eastern Africa, July 2009
(n=19 Countries/Territories)

	Indigenous Religions #	Muslim Population #	Christian Population #	Other Religions #	No Religion Population #	Total
Burundi	2,067,261	898,809	6,022,021	0	0	8,988,091
Comoros	0	737,389	15,049	0	0	752,438
Djibouti	0	485,092	30,963	0	0	516,055
Eritrea	0	2,524,284	2,851,820	271,064	0	5,647,168
Ethiopia	3,920,917	27,957,846	51,824,301	1,534,272	0	85,237,336
Kenya	3,900,277	3,900,277	30,422,162	780,055	0	39,002,771
Madagascar	10,739,849	1,445,749	8,467,958	0	0	20,653,556
Malawi	0	1,826,395	11,400,700	428,061	613,555	14,268,711
Mauritius	0	213,188	413,533	652,406	5137	1,284,264
Mayotte	0	217,052	6,713	0	0	223,765
Mozambique	10,834,639	4,333,856	6,500,783	0	0	21,669,278
Reunion	0	0	677,322	110,262	0	787,584
Rwanda	10,473	481,771	9,802,992	0	178,046	10,473,282
Seychelles	0	962	81,528	4,461	525	87,476
Somalia	0	9,832,017	0	0	0	9,832,017
Tanzania	13,956,500	15,105,859	11,986,171	0	0	41,048,530
Uganda	0	3,916,716	27,158,059	1,003,456	291,326	32,369,557
Zambia	3,202,940	118,627	5,670,390	2,870,783	0	11,862,740
Zimbabwe	2,734,231	0	8,544,472	113,926	0	11,392,629
Total	51,367,087	73,995,889	181,876,937	7,768,746	1,088,589	316,097,248
Percent of Total	16.3	23.4	57.5	2.5	0.3	100

Source: Compiled and calculated by author based on data in the 2008 *CIA World Factbook*. See the methodology section for all technical explanations.

MIDDLE AFRICA: JULY 2009 AND JULY 2001. According to table 3, as of July 2009 Christians comprised the highest number in Middle Africa, 79.2 million (65.2%) out of a total population of 121.5 million. There were also 17.85 million (14.7%) people who practiced indigenous religions, 16.96 million (14%) Muslims, 7.2 million (5.9%) people who practiced other religions, and 361,456 (0.3%) people who practiced no religion (table 3).

In July 2001, out of 96.8 million people in Middle Africa, Christians had the highest number: 61.8 million (64%). They were followed by 21 million (21.6%) people who practiced indigenous religions, 13.5 million (14%) Muslims, 437,688 (0.4%) people who practiced other religions, and zero percent who practiced no religion.⁴⁴

Table 3: Religious Breakdowns for the Countries of Middle Africa, July 2009
(n=9 Countries/Territories)

	Indigenous Religions #	Muslim Population #	Christian Population #	Other Religions #	No Religion Population #	Total
Angola	6,015,668	0	6,783,625	0.0	0	12,799,293
Cameroon	7,551,720	3,775,860	7,551,720	0	0	18,879,300
Central African Rep.	1,579,021	676,723	2,255,744	0	0	4,511,488
Chad	754,032	5,484,809	3,542,918	227,243	320,205	10,329,207
Congo, Rep.	1,926,148	80,256	2,006,404	0	0	4,012,808
Congo (D.R.)	0	6,869,254	54,954,033	6,869,254	0	68,692,541
Equatorial Guinea	0	25,338	550,460	57,643	0	633,441
Gabon	25,755	46,965	1,372,584	0	0	1,445,304
Sao Tome & Principe	0	0	164,826	6,593	41,260	212,679
Total	17,852,344	16,959,205	79,182,314	7,160,733	361,465	121,516,061
Percent of Total	14.7	14	65.2	5.9	0.3	100

Source: Compiled and calculated by author based on data in the 2008 CIA World Factbook. See the methodology section for all technical explanations.

NORTHERN AFRICA: JULY 2009 AND JULY 2001. In July 2009, Northern Africa had the vast majority of Muslims. Out of its 210.4 million people, 188.6 million (89.6%) were Muslim, 10.85 million (5%) were Christian, 10.3 million (4.9%) practiced indigenous religions, 705,677 (0.34%) practiced other religions, and zero percent practiced no religion (table 4).

In July 2001, of its total population of 183.2 million, Muslims accounted for 167 million (91.2%), 9 million (4.9%) practiced traditional or indigenous religions, 6.4 million (3.5%) were Christian, 632,920 (0.34%) practiced other religions, and zero percent practiced no religion.⁴⁵

Table 4: Religious Breakdowns for the Countries of Northern Africa, July 2009
(n=7 Countries/Territory)

	Indigenous Religions #	Muslim Population #	Christian Population #	Other Religions #	No Religion Population #	Total
Algeria	0	33,836,406	0.0	341,782	0	34,178,188
Egypt	0	74,774,582	8,308,287	0	0	83,082,869
Libya	0	6,121,121	0.0	189,313	0	6,310,434
Morocco	0	34,406,192	383,453	69,719	0	34,859,364
Sudan	10,271,956	28,761,477	2,054,391	0	0	41,087,824
Tunisia	0	10,276,612	104,863	104,863	0	10,486,338
Western Sahara	0	405,210	0	0	0	405,210
Total	10,271,956	188,581,600	10,850,994	705,677	0	210,410,227
Percent of Total	4.9	89.6	5	0.34	0	100

Source: Compiled and calculated by author based on data in the 2008 CIA World Factbook. See the methodology section for all technical explanations.

SOUTHERN AFRICA: JULY 2009 AND JULY 2001. Christians comprised the highest number in Southern Africa. As of July 2009, out of 56.4 million people in Southern Africa Christians accounted for 44.84 million (79.5%) of them. They were followed by 7.8 million (13.9%) people who practiced no religion, 2.23 million (3.9%) people who practiced other religions, 848,178 (1.5%) people who practiced Islam, and 672,137 (1.2%) people who practiced indigenous religions (table 5).

In 2001, out of the 50.25 million people in Southern Africa, 34.2 million of them were Christian, 14.1 million (27.9%) practiced indigenous religions, 1.1 million (2.1%) practiced other religions, 871,722 (1.7%) were Muslim, and zero percent practiced no religion.⁴⁶

Table 5: Religious Breakdowns for the Countries of Southern Africa, July 2009 (n=5 Countries)

	Indigenous Religions #	Muslim Population #	Christian Population #	Other Religions #	No Religion Population #	Total
Botswana	119,453	0	1,425,467	35,836	410,120	1,990,876
Lesotho	426,164	0	1,704,655	0	0	2,130,819
Namibia	126,520	0	1,602,585	379,560	0	2,108,665
South Africa	0	735,787	39,094,833	1,814,942	7,406,926	49,052,488
Swaziland	0	112,391	1,011,522	0	0	1,123,913
Total	672,137	848,178	44,839,062	2,230,338	7,817,046	56,406,761
Percent of Total	1.2	1.5	79.5	3.9	13.9	100

Source: Compiled and calculated by author based on data in the 2008 *CIA World Factbook*. See the methodology section for all technical explanations.

WESTERN AFRICA: JULY 2009 AND JULY 2001. Muslims have the highest total number and percentage in Western Africa. As of July 2009, out of a total population of 292.6 million, Muslims accounted for 154.4 million (52.7%). They were followed by 94.4 million (32.2%) Christians, 37.6 million (12.8%) people who practiced indigenous religions, 1.545 million (0.5%) people who practice other religions, and 4.75 million (1.6%) people who practiced no religion (table 6).

In July 2001, out of a total population of 240.7 million in Western Africa, Muslims accounted for 130.8 million (54.3%) people. They were followed by 66.7 million (27.7%) Christians, 41.62 million (17.3%) people who practiced indigenous religions, 1.6 million (0.6%) people who practiced other religions, and zero percent who practiced no religion.⁴⁷

Table 6: Religious Breakdowns for the Countries of Western Africa, July 2009
(n=19 Countries/Territory)

	Indigenous Religions #	Muslim Population #	Christian Population #	Other Religions #	No Religion Population #	Total
Benin	1,520,987	2,145,207	3,762,904	1,362,734	0	8,791,832
Burkina Faso	6,298,493	7,873,116	1,574,623	0	0	15,746,232
Cape Verde	0	0	429,474	0	0	429,474
Cote d'Ivoire	2,453,431	7,958,188	6,762,398	0	3298731	20,472,748
Gambia	35,658	1,604,604	142,631	0	0	1,782,893
Ghana	2,025,762	3,789,367	16,396,756	166,827	1453782	23,832,494
Guinea	704,058	8,549,279	804,638	0	0	10,057,975
Guinea-Bissau	613,586	766,982	153,396	0	0	1,533,964
Liberia	1,376,716	688,358	1,376,716	0	0	3,441,790
Mali	1,140,029	11,400,288	126,670	0	0	12,666,987
Mauritania	0	3,129,486	0	0	0	3,129,486
Niger	1,331,644	13,882,770	76,531	15,306	0	15,306,251
Nigeria	14,922,909	74,614,545	59,691,636	0	0	149,229,090
Senegal	137,116	12,888,901	685,580	0	0	13,711,597
Sierra Leone	1,932,016	3,864,032	644,005	0	0	6,440,053
Togo	3,070,137	1,203,975	1,745,764	0	0	6,019,876
Saint Helena	0	0	7,637	0	0	7,637
Total	37,562,542	154,359,098	94,381,359	1,544,867	4,752,513	292,600,379
Percent of Total	12.8	52.7	32.2	0.5	1.6	99.8

Source: Compiled and calculated by author based on data in the 2008 *CIA World Factbook*. See the methodology section for all technical explanations.

CURRENT AND FORMER AFRICAN COLONIES OF FRANCE: JULY 2009 AND JULY 2001. Muslims account for a very high majority of the people in the current and former African colonies of France. As of July 2009, out of the 247.4 million people in these current and former colonies, Muslims accounted for 160.42 million (64.8%) people. They were followed by 41.9 million (17%) Christians, 39.23 million (15.9%) people who practiced indigenous religions, 3.62 million (1.5%) people who practiced no religion, and 2.23 million (0.009%) who practiced other religions (table 7).

In July 2001, out of the 203.7 million people in these former colonies, Muslims accounted for 137.2 million (67.2%), those who practiced indigenous religions accounted for 36.9 million (18.1%), Christians accounted for 28.7 million (14%), 879,514 (0.4%) practiced other religions, and zero percent practiced no religion.⁴⁸

Table 7: Religious Breakdown for the Current and Former African Colonies of France, July 2009 (N=20 Countries/Territory)

	Indigenous Religions #	Muslim Population #	Christian Population #	Other Religions #	No Religion Population #	Total
Algeria	0	33,836,406	0.0	341,782	0	34,178,188
Benin	1,520,987	2,145,207	3,762,904	1,362,734	0	8,791,832
Burkina Faso	6,298,493	7,873,116	1,574,623	0	0	15,746,232
Cameroon	7,551,720	3,775,860	7,551,720	0	0	18,879,300
Central African Rep.	1,579,021	676,723	2,255,744	0	0	4,511,488
Chad	754,032	5,484,809	3,542,918	227,243	320,205	10,329,207
Comoros	0	737,389	15,049	0	0	752,438
Congo, Rep.	1,926,148	80,256	2,006,404	0	0	4,012,808
Cote d'Ivoire	2,453,431	7,958,188	6,762,398	0	3,298,731	20,472,748
Gabon	25,755	46,965	1,372,584	0	0	1,445,304
Guinea	704,058	8,549,279	804,638	0	0	10,057,975
Madagascar	10,739,849	1,445,749	8,467,958	0	0	20,653,556
Mali	1,140,029	11,400,288	126,670	0	0	12,666,987
Mauritania	0	3,129,486	0	0	0	3,129,486
Mayotte	0	217,052	6,713	0	0	223,765
Morocco	0	34,406,192	383,453	69,719	0	34,859,364
Niger	1,331,644	13,882,770	76,531	15,306	0	15,306,251
Reunion	0	0	677,322	110,262	0	787,584
Senegal	137,116	12,888,901	685,580	0	0	13,711,597
Togo	3,070,137	1,203,975	1,745,764	0	0	6,019,876
Tunisia	0	10,276,612	104,863	104,863	0	10,486,338
Western Sahara	0	405,210	0	0	0	405,210
Total	39,232,420	160,420,433	41,923,836	2,231,909	3,618,936	247,427,534
Percent of Total	15.9	64.8	17.0	0.009	1.5	99.2

Source: Compiled and calculated by author based on data in the 2008 *CIA World Factbook*. See the methodology section for all technical explanations.

CURRENT AND FORMER AFRICAN COLONIES OF THE UNITED KINGDOM: JULY 2009 AND JULY 2001. Both Muslims and Christians have almost equal numbers of followers in the current and former African colonies of the United Kingdom in July 2009. Out of the total population of 521 million people in July 2009, Christians accounted for 226.2 million (43.4%), while Muslims accounted for 223.2 million (42.8%), 53.53 million (10.3%) practiced indigenous religions, 10.2 million (2%) practiced no religion, and 7.9 million (1.5%) practiced other religions (table 8).

In July 2001, out of a total population of 438.9 million people in these former colonies, Muslims accounted for 194.6 million (44.3%); 165.1 million (37.6%) were Christians, 72 million (16.4%) practiced indigenous religions, 7.2 million (1.6%) practiced other religions, and zero percent practiced no religion.⁴⁹

Table 8: Religious Breakdown for the Current and Former African Colonies of the United, Kingdom, July 2009 (N=20 countries)

	Indigenous Religions #	Muslim Population #	Christian Population #	Other Religions #	No Religion Population #	Total
Botswana	119,453	0	1,425,467	35,836	410,120	1,990,876
Egypt	0	74,774,582	8,308,287	0	0	83,082,869
Gambia	35,658	1,604,604	142,631	0	0	1,782,893
Ghana	2,025,762	3,789,367	16,396,756	166,827	1,453,782	23,832,494
Kenya	3,900,277	3,900,277	30,422,162	780,055	0	39,002,771
Lesotho	426,164	0	1,704,655	0	0	2,130,819
Malawi	0	1,826,395	11,400,700	428,061	613,555	14,268,711
Mauritius	0	213,188	413,533	652,406	5,137	1,284,264
Nigeria	14,922,909	74,614,545	59,691,636	0	0	149,229,090
Seychelles	0	962	81,528	4,461	525	87,476
Sierra Leone	1,932,016	3,864,032	644,005	0	0	6,440,053
Somalia	0	9,832,017	0	0	0	9,832,017
South Africa	0	735,787	39,094,833	1,814,942	7,406,926	49,052,488
Saint Helena	0	0	7,637	0	0	7,637
Sudan	10,271,956	28,761,477	2,054,391	0	0	41,087,824
Swaziland	0	112,391	1,011,522	0	0	1,123,913
Tanzania	13,956,500	15,105,859	11,986,171	0	0	41,048,530
Uganda	0	3,916,716	27,158,059	1,003,456	291,326	32,369,557
Zambia	3,202,940	118,627	5,670,390	2,870,783	0	11,862,740
Zimbabwe	2,734,231	0	8,544,472	113,926	0	11,392,629
Total	53,527,866	223,170,826	226,158,835	7,870,753	10,181,371	520,909,651
Percent of Total	10.3	42.8	43.4	1.5	2.0	100.0

Source: Compiled and calculated by author based on data in the 2008 *CIA World Factbook*. See the methodology section for all technical explanations.

FORMER AFRICAN COLONIES OF PORTUGAL: JULY 2009 AND JULY 2001.

Africans who practice indigenous religions have the highest number and percentage in the former African colonies of Portugal. Out of a total population of 36.6 million people in these former colonies in July 2009, 17.5 million (47.8%) practiced indigenous religions, 14 million (38.3%) were Christian, 5.1 million (13.9%) were Muslim, 41,260 (0.001%) practiced no religion, and 6,593 (0.0002%) practiced other religions (table 9).

In July 2001, out of 31.6 million people in these former colonies, 15.2 million (48.1%) practiced indigenous religions, 11.9 million (37.7%) were Christian, 4.5 million (14.1%) were Muslim, and zero percent each practiced other religions and no religion.⁵⁰

Table 9: Religious Breakdown for the Former African Colonies of Portugal, July 2009
(N=5 Countries)

	Indigenous Religions #	Muslim Population #	Christian Population #	Other Religions #	No Religion Population #	Total
Angola	6,015,668	0	6,783,625	0.0	0	12,799,293
Cape Verde	0	0	429,474	0	0	429,474
Guinea-Bissau	613,586	766,982	153,396	0	0	1,533,964
Mozambique	10,834,639	4,333,856	6,500,783	0	0	21,669,278
Sao Tome & Principe	0	0	164,826	6,593	41,260	212,679
Total	17,463,893	5,100,838	14,032,104	6,593	41,260	36,644,688
Percent of Total	47.8	13.9	38.3	0.0002	0.001	100.0

Source: Compiled and calculated by author based on data in the *2008 CIA World Factbook*. See the methodology section for all technical explanations.

FORMER AFRICAN COLONIES OF BELGIUM: JULY 2009 AND JULY 2001.

Just over 4 out of every 5 people in the former African colonies of Belgium are Christian. In July 2009, out of a total population of 88.15 million people in these former colonies, 70.8 million (80.3%) were Christian, 8.25 million (9.3%) were Muslim, 6.9 million (7.8%) practiced other religions, 2.1 million (2.4%) practiced indigenous religions, and 178,046 (0.2%) practiced no religion (table 10).

In July 2001, out of 67.2 million people in these former colonies, 52.5 million (78.1%) were Christian, 8.6 million (12.8%) practiced indigenous religions, 6.1 million (9%) were Muslim, and zero percent each belonged to other religions and no religion.⁵¹

Table 10: Religious Breakdown for the Former African Colonies of Belgium, July 2009
(N=3 Countries)

	Indigenous Religions #	Muslim Population #	Christian Population #	Other Religions #	No Religion Population #	Total
Burundi	2,067,261	898,809	6,022,021	0	0	8,988,091
Congo (D.R.)	0	6,869,254	54,954,033	6,869,254	0	68,692,541
Rwanda	10,473	481,771	9,802,992	0	178,046	10,473,282
Total	2,077,734	8,249,834	70,779,046	6,869,254	178,046	88,153,914
Percent of Total	2.4	9.3	80.3	7.8	0.2	100.0

Source: Compiled and calculated by author based on data in the *2008 CIA World Factbook*. See the methodology section for all technical explanations.

AFRICAN NATIONS GROUPED AS “OTHER”: JULY 2009 AND JULY 2001. Out of 99.9 million people in African nations grouped as “other” in July 2009, 56.8 million (57%) were Christian, 36.6 million (36.6%) were Muslim, 4 million (4%) practiced indigenous religions, 2.4 million (2.4%) practiced other religions, and zero percent belonged to no religion (table 11).

In July 2001, out of a total population of 80.9 million people in these nations, 45.4 million (56.1%) were Christian, 29.3 million (36.2%) were Muslim, 4.6 million (5.6%) practiced indigenous religions, 1.6 million (1.9%) practiced other religions, and zero percent practiced no religion.⁵²

Table 11: Religious Breakdown for the African Countries Grouped as Other, July 2009 (N=6 Countries).

	Indigenous Religions #	Muslim Population #	Christian Population #	Other Religions #	No Religion Population #	Total
Eritrea	0	2,524,284	2,851,820	271,064	0	5,647,168
Ethiopia	3,920,917	27,957,846	51,824,301	1,534,272	0	85,237,336
Equatorial Guinea	0	25,338	550,460	57,643	0	633,441
Liberia	1,376,716	688,358	1,376,716	0	0	3,441,790
Libya	0	6,121,121	0.0	189,313	0	6,310,434
Namibia	126,520	0	1,602,585	379,560	0	2,108,665
Total	4,047,437	36,628,589	56,829,166	2,431,852	0	99,937,044
Percent of Total	4.0	36.6	57.0	2.4	0.0	100.0

Source: Compiled and calculated by author based on data in the 2008 *CIA World Factbook*. See the methodology section for all technical explanations.

Conclusion

Africa’s total population increased massively after World War II. In 1950, for example, its total population was estimated at 221 million⁵³; by 2009, its total population had increased by over 776 million to 997 million. Muslims and Christians have benefited enormously from this development, for both religions now account for over four out of every five Africans on the continent as of July 2009. With this large-scale conversion comes a real degree of influence for Islam in economic, political, social, and other ways. Finally, given that Muslims living in Africa account for 31 percent of the world’s Muslims and are also the world’s youngest people (median age of 19.7 years in Africa in 2008; for the world, the average was 27.4 years for men and 28.7 years for women,⁵⁴ African Muslims have the potential to influence Islam in any number of important ways.

Appendix

Classification of Regions of Africa (N=57)

Eastern Africa (n=19)

Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Reunion, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mayotte.

Middle/Central Africa (n=9)

Angola, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Sao Tome & Principe.

Northern Africa (n=7)

Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia and Western Sahara.

Southern Africa (n=5)

Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland.

Western Africa (n=17)

Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo and Saint Helena.

Source: Country/regional classifications by the United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Retrieved on April, 10, 2009, from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm>.

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53. "World Population Prospects," United Nations Population Division. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. New York. 28 February 2001.
54. See Amadu Jacky Kaba, "Africa's Development in the Era of Barack Obama: The Role of the African Union," *Journal of Pan African Studies* 2, no. 9 (2009): 110.