

## Chapter 5: Religion and Society

Across the sub-Saharan region, large numbers of Christians and Muslims alike express strong support for democracy as well as for religious freedom. At the same time, there is strong backing among both groups for government based on the Bible or sharia law. And sizable numbers, especially among Muslims, support the application of criminal sanctions such as whipping or cutting off the hands of people who commit theft or robbery.

People in the region hold very conservative views on issues such as abortion, homosexuality and prostitution. Majorities in nearly every country surveyed say Western music, movies and television have hurt morality in their nation. At the same time, however, majorities in most countries say they personally like Western entertainment.

Those living in the region generally support the right of religious leaders to speak out on political questions. Most people are comfortable with having political leaders who do not share their faith, but large majorities in nearly every country say it is important to them that their political leaders have strong religious beliefs.

Views on whether women should have equal access to jobs or serve in religious leadership roles are somewhat divided along religious lines, with Muslims in some countries being less supportive than Christians of women's rights in these areas. Men are also less supportive than women in some countries.

Many people in sub-Saharan Africa believe they do not have much say in what their government does, and most express dissatisfaction with the way things are going in their country. In 14 of the 19 countries, clear majorities of those surveyed express dissatisfaction with the way things are going. In particular, sub-Saharan Africans commonly cite unemployment as a big problem, and many people in the region say they have had trouble affording food and other basic necessities. Nevertheless, sub-Saharan Africans are at least as likely as people in any other region of the world to say their lives have improved over the last five years, and they are more likely than people in other regions to express optimism about the future.

## Support for Democracy and Religious Freedom

Large numbers of people throughout the region express strong support for democracy. Asked whether democracy is preferable to any other kind of government or whether “in some circumstances, a nondemocratic government can be preferable,” strong majorities in every country choose democracy. In most places, there is no significant difference between Muslims and Christians on this question. Support for democracy stands at 80% or higher in Ghana, Rwanda, Botswana, Senegal and Kenya, and is lowest in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique and South Africa, where about six-in-ten express support.

In every country, regardless of its religious makeup, roughly two-thirds or more of the people surveyed believe that followers of religions different from their own are very free to practice their faith, and most people view this as a good thing. This pattern holds true among both Muslims and Christians.

At the same time, the survey finds substantial support among Muslims and Christians alike for basing civil law on the Bible or sharia law. Although this may simply reflect the importance of religion in the region, it is nonetheless striking that in 13 of 16 countries with a sufficient number of Christians to analyze, half or more Christians favor making the Bible the official law of the land. And in 12 of 15 countries where analysis of the Muslim population is possible, half or more of Muslims favor establishing sharia, or Islamic law, in their countries. Support for religiously based civil law is highest, at roughly eight-in-ten, among Muslims in Djibouti (82%) and among Christians in Zambia (77%). Significant minorities of Christians in 15 countries and at least half of Muslims in every country also support allowing leaders and judges to use their religious beliefs when deciding family and property disputes.

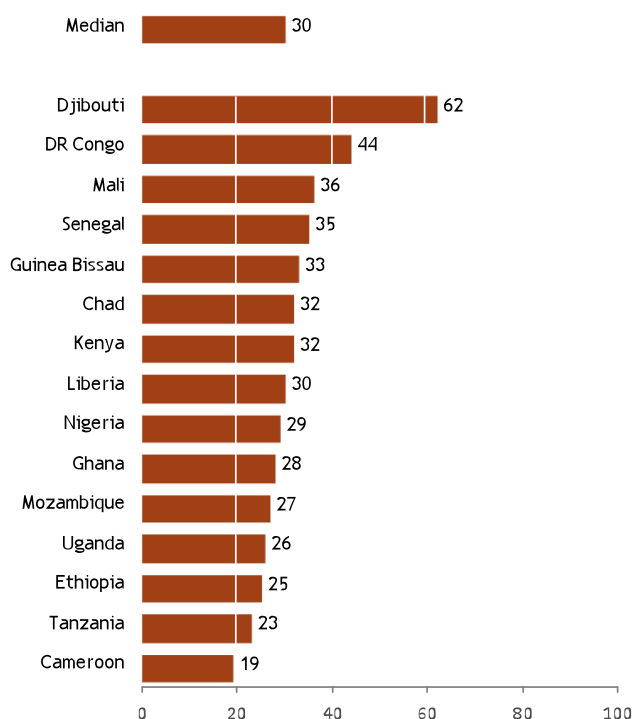
In the three predominantly Muslim nations surveyed (Djibouti, Mali and Senegal) as well as in Guinea Bissau, most Muslims express support for severe corporal punishments such as whippings and cutting off of hands for crimes such as theft and robbery. In most of the other countries surveyed, between one-third and one-half of Muslims agree with this position. Significant numbers of Muslims (roughly a third or more in 13 countries) also favor stoning people who commit adultery. In nearly all countries (with the exception of Guinea Bissau), far fewer Christians express support for these kinds of punishments.

In every country that has a substantial Muslim population, roughly one-in-five or more Muslims favor the death penalty for people who leave Islam. Support for capital punishment for those who leave Islam is highest in Djibouti (62%).

In total, the survey included four items related to religiously based jurisprudence (making the Bible or sharia the law of the land; punishments like whippings and cutting off hands for crimes such as theft and robbery; stoning people who commit adultery; and allowing religious judges to settle disputes). Combining these four items into a scale provides a sense of the overall level of support for making religious law the basis of civil law. Overall, Muslim support for these measures is higher than Christian support in nearly all of the countries where comparisons are possible; Guinea Bissau is the lone exception. In most of the countries surveyed, however, at least one-in-ten Christians express high or very high support for making religious law the basis of civil law, including more than a third of Christians in Guinea Bissau.

### Support for Death Penalty for Those Who Leave Islam

*% of Muslims saying they favor death penalty for those who leave Islam*

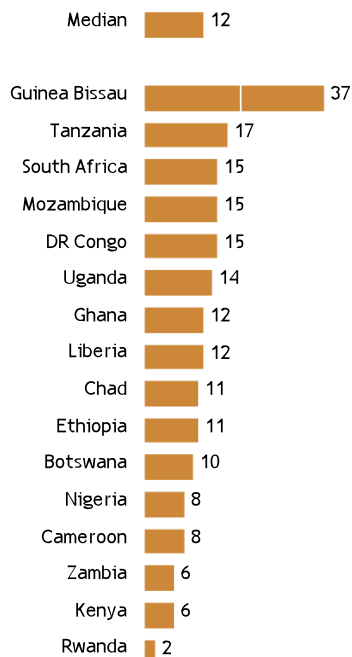


Q95c. *And do you favor or oppose the following? The death penalty for people who leave the Muslim religion.*

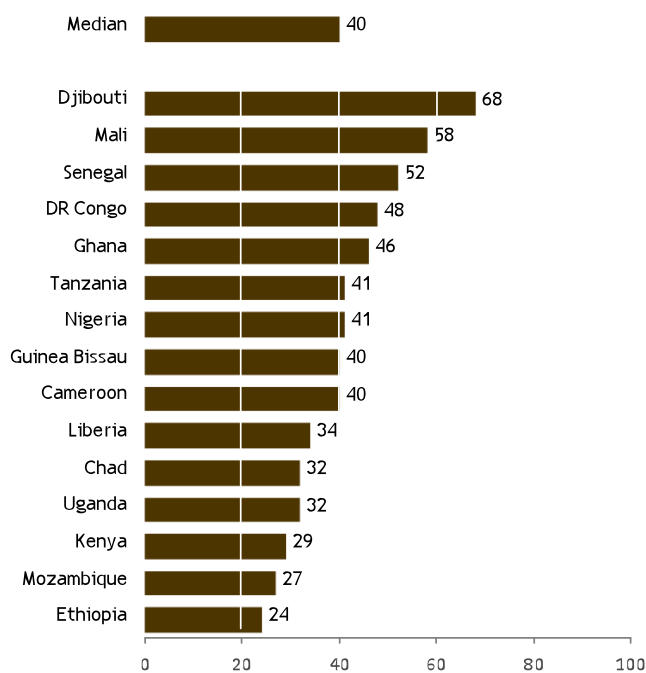
Based on Muslims.

## Support for Religious Jurisprudence

*% of Christians reporting high levels of support for religious jurisprudence*



*% of Muslims reporting high levels of support for religious jurisprudence*



*Index is a count of the number of "favor" responses given in response to Q94a-d/Q95a,b,d, and e (Support for Biblical/sharia law, having religious judges decide civil disputes, corporal punishment for criminals, and death penalty for adultery). Index ranges from 0-4. Scores of 3 or 4 are considered high. (Total alpha=.66; Among Christians, alpha=.51; Among Muslims, alpha=.74; Despite the low alpha for Christians, they are included here for comparison with Muslims.)*

## Religion and Politics

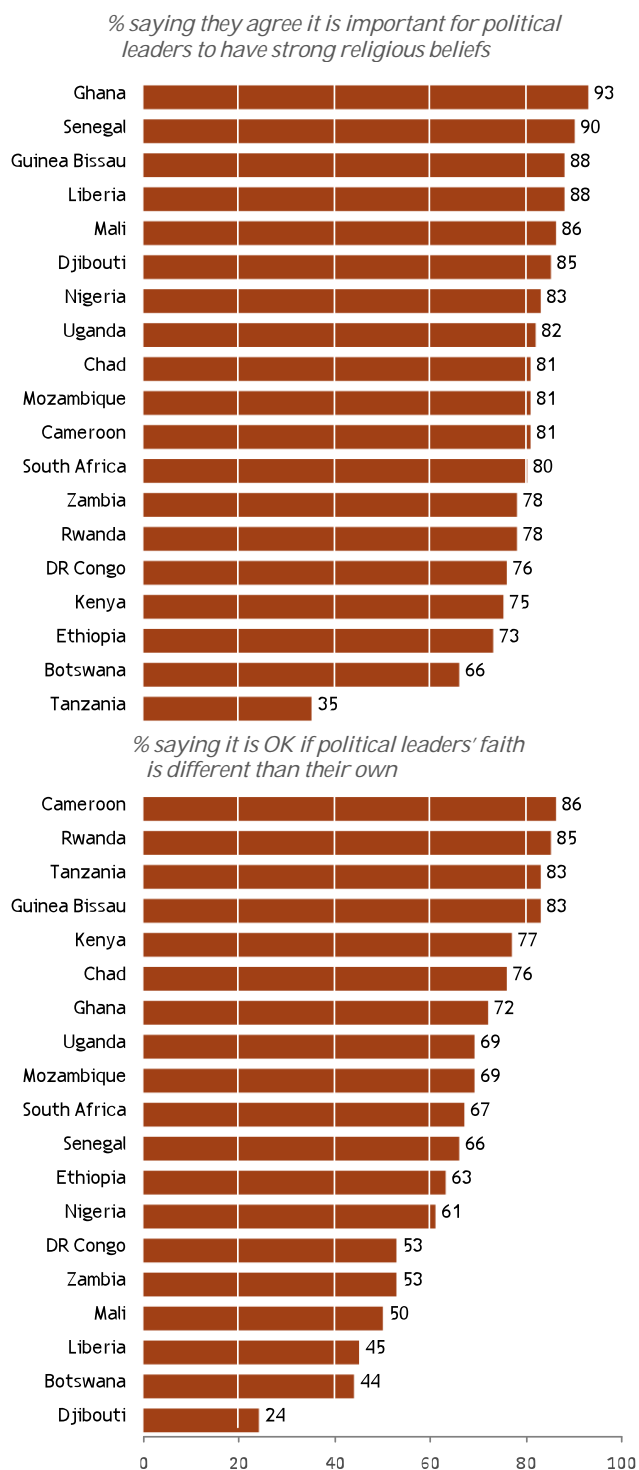
A majority of the population in most countries surveyed support the right of religious leaders to express their views on political questions. In most countries, there are few differences between Muslims and Christians on this question. In Nigeria, for example, two-thirds of the population (67%), including roughly equal numbers of Christians and Muslims, welcome such expressions from religious leaders. The only country where a clear majority (63%) opposes religious leaders involving themselves with political issues is Ethiopia, with opposition among Christians running especially high (67%).

Large majorities in nearly every country say it is important to them that their political leaders have strong religious beliefs. In fact, in 12 of the 19 countries surveyed, at least eight-in-ten people take this view. At the same time, majorities of respondents in most countries surveyed say it is all right if their political leaders are from a religion different than their own.

*Q14. And how do you feel about this statement: It's important to me that political leaders of our country have strong religious beliefs. Do you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree, or completely disagree with it?*

*Q15. And would it be OK with you if the political leaders of our country have a different religion than yours, or do you only want political leaders who share your religion?*

## Most Want Political Leaders With Strong Religious Beliefs, Comfortable if Leaders' Faith Is Different than Their Own



## Traditional in Morality as well as Religion

African Muslims and Christians see a close relationship between religion and morality, with at least two-thirds of the population in most countries saying it is necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values. At least three-in-four people in nearly every country believe there are clear and absolute standards of right and wrong. Tanzania and Ethiopia are the only exceptions, and even there more than two-thirds of the population believes in absolute standards.

Majorities in almost all the countries surveyed believe that Western music, movies and television have hurt morality in their nation. South Africa and Guinea Bissau are the only countries where less than half take this view. At the same time, however, a majority of people in 15 of the 19 countries say they personally like Western entertainment. And in nine countries, people are more inclined to say there is not a conflict between being a devout religious person and living in modern society than to say there is such a conflict. By contrast, there are only four countries where the reverse is true; opinion on this issue is evenly divided in the remaining six countries.

On social issues, Christians and Muslims alike express very strong opposition to abortion, prostitution, suicide and homosexual behavior, with nine-in-ten or more in many countries calling these practices morally wrong. Large majorities in nearly every country express opposition to sex between unmarried people, and substantial numbers (roughly four-in-ten or more) in every country say that AIDS is God's punishment for immoral sexual behavior. Majorities in most countries oppose drinking alcohol; opposition is especially strong among Muslims. Divorce is also widely seen as morally wrong. In many countries, opposition to divorce is particularly strong among Christians.

There are pronounced differences between Christians and Muslims on polygamy, with Muslims being much more amenable to the practice than Christians. In Nigeria, for example, nearly three-quarters of Muslims (72%) say it is morally acceptable or not a moral issue for a man to have multiple wives, while just one-in-five Christians (20%) agree.

## Gender Issues and the Role of Women

The practice of female circumcision (also known as female genital cutting) is most common in the predominantly Muslim countries of Mali and Djibouti (where 79% and 59% of Muslim parents, respectively, say they have had their daughters circumcised). And in Chad, Guinea Bissau, Liberia and Ghana more Muslims than Christians say they have had a daughter circumcised. However, the practice is not very common in predominantly Muslim Senegal (4%).<sup>1</sup> In Ethiopia, Nigeria, Tanzania and Kenya, roughly equal percentages of Christians and Muslims say they have had a daughter circumcised. And in Uganda, more Christians than Muslims say they have had a daughter circumcised (15% vs. 6%).

On the question of working women, Muslims in five countries are more likely than Christians to say that when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women. There also are some significant gender differences on this question. Men are more likely than women to share this view in 11 of the 19 countries; in the other countries surveyed, there are no significant differences between men and women on this question.

In 10 of the 15 countries with large enough Muslim samples to analyze, half or more of Muslims say that women should not have the right to decide whether to wear a veil, saying instead that this issue should be up to society as a whole. Looking at gender differences, more Muslim men than women say that society should decide whether or not women should wear the veil in five out of 10 countries where gender comparisons are possible. In predominantly Muslim Senegal, however, a majority of Muslims say women should be able to make this decision themselves.

	Muslim Views on Veiling		
	<i>Women should...</i>		
	<b>NOT</b> have the right to decide whether to wear a veil	Have the right to decide if they wear a veil	Neither/ Both/ DK/Ref
	%	%	%
Nigeria	64	30	6=100
Cameroon	64	33	4=100
Ethiopia	63	34	3=100
DR Congo	58	29	13=100
Kenya	58	41	2=100
Mozambique	58	40	3=100
Uganda	58	40	3=100
Chad	57	39	4=100
Ghana	53	33	14=100
Tanzania	52	47	1=100
Mali	47	42	11=100
Liberia	47	43	10=100
Guinea Bissau	42	38	20=100
Djibouti	38	48	14=100
Senegal	35	58	7=100

*Q59d. Now I'm going to read you two statements. Please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views — even if neither is exactly right. (READ STATEMENTS) (SHOW CARD) 1 - Women should have the right to decide if they wear a veil OR 2 - Women should not have the right to decide whether to wear a veil — society should decide.*

<sup>1</sup> This low nationwide figure may mask very large regional variations within Senegal. According to data compiled by the Population Reference Bureau, the incidence of female genital cutting within Senegal varies from a low of 1.8% to a high of 93.8% depending on the region of the country.

Views on whether women should be allowed to serve in religious leadership roles are clearly divided along religious and gender lines. Christians in most countries are much more supportive than Muslims of women serving as religious leaders, and in 12 of the 19 countries men are less likely than women to say women should serve in leadership roles.

### Affordability of Food, Medicine and Clothing

Unemployment is commonly cited as a very important problem by people living in sub-Saharan Africa. And across the region, many people report struggling to afford life's basic necessities. Half or more of respondents in 12 of the countries surveyed say there have been times in the last year when they have been unable to afford food, and half or more of respondents in 13 countries say the same for clothing. Likewise, half or more of the population in 12 countries say there have been times when they were unable to afford medical care. Even in South Africa – one of the wealthiest countries surveyed – roughly half say that at one time or another in the last year they have been unable to afford food (53%), medical services (51%) and clothing (52%).

In Nigeria and Tanzania, more Muslims than Christians report having faced such hardships. By contrast, financial struggles are more common among Christians than Muslims in Chad, Cameroon, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Large majorities in every country agree that it is the responsibility of the government to take care of the poor and needy. In fact, in 13 of the countries surveyed, six-in-ten or more respondents say they completely agree that the government is responsible for caring for the poor.

### Support for Restricting Religious Leadership Roles to Men

*% agree that only men should be allowed to serve*

	Among Christians	Among Muslims	Difference b/w Muslims and Christians
	%	%	%
Ghana	18	73	+ 55
Liberia	18	62	+ 44
Uganda	24	68	+ 44
Kenya	20	63	+ 43
Cameroon	50	83	+ 33
Tanzania	37	68	+ 31
Chad	54	80	+ 26
Nigeria	42	67	+ 25
DR Congo	59	73	+ 14
Ethiopia	69	83	+ 14
Guinea Bissau	49	60	+ 11
Mozambique	34	36	+ 2

Q59c. Now I'm going to read you two statements. Please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views — even if neither is exactly right. 1 - Women should be allowed to serve in religious leadership roles, such as pastor, priest or imam OR 2 - Only men should be able to serve in religious leadership roles, such as pastor, priest or imam.



## Current Life Satisfaction, Progress and Optimism

Compared with people surveyed in 2007 in other regions of the world, somewhat fewer sub-Saharan Africans today indicate they are highly satisfied with their lives. When asked to place themselves on a “ladder of life,” where zero reflects the worst possible life and 10 represents the best possible life, fewer than half of the respondents in every country surveyed give their lives a high rating (7 or higher on the scale).

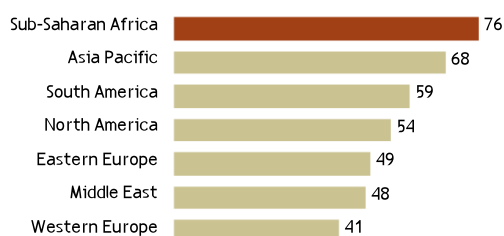
This does not mean, however, that sub-Saharan Africans rate their life satisfaction as uniformly low (0-3 on the scale). Indeed, in most countries surveyed, the bulk of the respondents are in the middle range on life satisfaction (4-6).

Despite their middling levels of satisfaction with their lives, roughly half or more of the respondents in 10 of the 19 countries say that their lives are better today than five years ago. This includes upwards of two-thirds of the population in Chad (73%) and Nigeria (67%). People living in sub-Saharan Africa are somewhat more likely to see progress than people in some other parts of the world. The median response for the 19 sub-Saharan African countries surveyed is 48%, which is somewhat higher than the 2007 median responses in the Middle East (34%), Western Europe (39%), Asia-Pacific (39%) and Eastern Europe (41%).

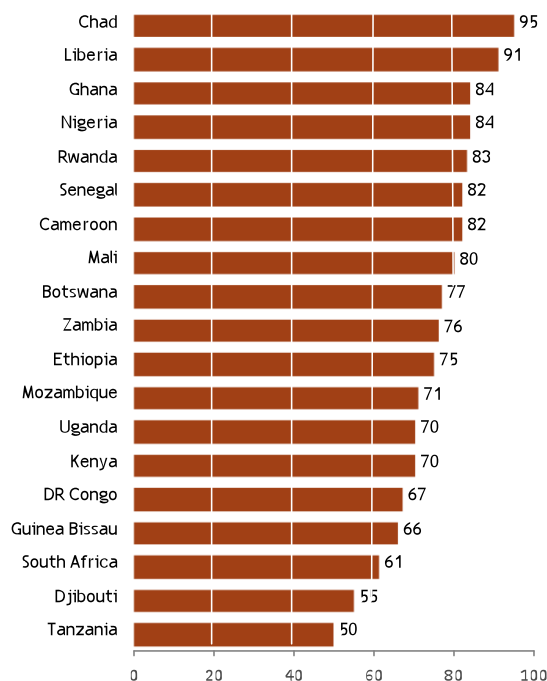
### Many Are Optimistic About the Future

*% who say their lives will be better in five years*

*Median among countries in...*



*Among general population in...*



Q2, 4. Here is a ladder representing the “ladder of life.” Let’s suppose the top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you; and the bottom, the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder do you feel you personally stand at the present time? (SHOW 0-10 CARD) Just your best guess, on which step do you think you will stand in the future, say five years from now? (SHOW 0-10 CARD). Source for data from non-African nations: Pew Global Attitudes Project 2007 survey.

Not only do many sub-Saharan Africans say that their lives have improved in recent years, at least half in every country surveyed express optimism about the future. In fact, in 17 of the 19 countries, upwards of six-in-ten respondents say their lives will be better in the future. This includes more than nine-in-ten respondents in Liberia (91%) and Chad (95%), and at least eight-in-ten respondents in Mali (80%), Cameroon, Senegal (82% each), Rwanda (83%), Nigeria and Ghana (84% each).

Among the publics surveyed in sub-Saharan Africa, the median expressing optimism about the future is 76%, which is considerably higher than the median for Western Europe (41%), the Middle East (48%), Eastern Europe (49%), North America (54%) and South America (59%). For the most part, a similar proportion of Muslims and Christians report progress in their lives and optimism about the future.