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Christianity, Islam, and Liberal Democracy: Lessons from Sub-Saharan Africa

By Robert A. Dowd



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Drawing from research conducted in Nigeria, Senegal, and Uganda, *Christianity, Islam, and Liberal Democracy* offers a deeper understanding of how Christian and Islamic faith communities affect the political attitudes of those who belong to them and, in turn, prospects for liberal democracy. While many analysts believe that religious diversity in developing countries is an impediment to liberal democracy, Robert A. Dowd concludes just the opposite. Dowd draws on narrative accounts, in-depth interviews, and large-scale surveys to show that Christian and Islamic religious communities are more likely to support liberal democracy in religiously diverse and integrated settings than in religiously homogeneous or segregated ones. Religious diversity and integration, in other words, are good for liberal democracy. In religiously diverse and integrated environments, religious leaders tend to be more encouraging of civic engagement, democracy, and religious liberty.

By providing a theoretical framework for understanding when and where Christian and Islamic communities in sub-Saharan Africa encourage and discourage liberal democracy, Dowd demonstrates how religious communities are important in affecting political actions and attitudes. This evidence, the book ultimately argues, should prompt policymakers interested in cultivating religiously-inspired support for liberal democracy to aid in the formation of religiously diverse neighborhoods, cities, and political organizations.



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Editorial Review

Review

"Robert Dowd's fascinating work highlights religious diversity and integration in a broadly tolerant, democratic African culture. This book is based on thorough field research, and specialists will find insights on every page. But the book should not be consigned solely to academia. It has immediate relevance to policy makers crafting responses to ethnic and religious conflict in Africa in general, and, in particular, to the bloody, radical Islamist insurgency called Boko Haram in northern Nigeria." --Amb. John Campbell, ret., Ralph Bunche Senior Fellow for Africa Policy Studies, Council on Foreign Relations

"Robert Dowd wrestles with the counter-intuitive hypothesis that religious diversity in African contexts predicts greater tolerance, which over time facilitates a political culture of liberal democracy. This is in contrast to the frequent assumption that religious homogeneity leads to more political stability and that more diversity leads to conflict. I strongly recommend this book both to scholars of African religion and political culture, and to generalists trying to make sense of larger global patterns." --John N. Paden, Clarence Robinson Professor of International Studies, George Mason University

"In lucid and accessible prose, Robert Dowd offers startling new observations about the relationship between religion and democracy in a region often neglected by political scientists and policy analysts-sub-Saharan Africa. And the conclusion he draws is of enormous theoretical and practical significance: that intense religious diversity and inter-religious interaction are not a hindrance to democracy but a key catalyst for the development of robust political and religious freedom. This is a landmark book that should be required reading for scholars and policy makers alike." --Timothy Samuel Shah, Associate Director & Scholar in Residence, Religious Freedom Project, Berkley Center For Religion, Peace & World Affairs, Georgetown University

About the Author

Robert A. Dowd is Assistant Professor of Political Science and director of the Ford Family Program in Human Development Studies and Solidarity of the Kellogg Institute for International Studies at the University of Notre Dame.

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